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**WATERLOO**

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# WATERLOO

BY THE LATE

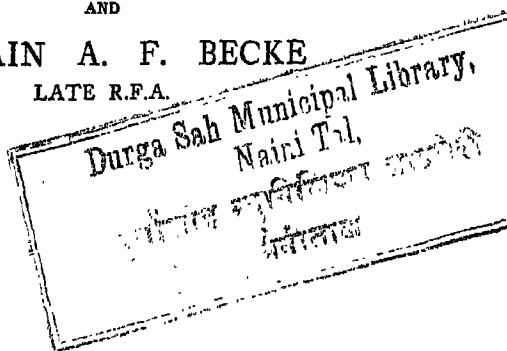
CAPTAIN J. W. E. DONALDSON

R.F.A., P.S.C.

AND

CAPTAIN A. F. BECKE

LATE R.F.A.



*WITH ONE MAP AND TWO PLANS*

London

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1907

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*"C'est un principe qui n'admet pas d'exception, que toute jonction de corps d'armée doit s'opérer en arrière et loin de l'ennemi."—NAPOLÉON.*

## P R E F A C E

OWING to Waterloo being the Campaign set for Promotion examinations in next November, and also again in May 1908, it has been suggested that this short study, which forms Chapter V. in the second edition of *Military History applied to Modern Warfare*, by the late Captain Donaldson and myself, might prove useful to officers studying these campaigns, and who may not require the larger work. As this short study treats the subject from a somewhat different standpoint from that of the ordinary works that are being studied on this campaign, it has been decided to issue it separately, in the hope that it may perhaps supplement the knowledge of the campaign gleaned from a perusal of the usual text-books.

No three days in the world's history have perhaps been more written about than those which saw the Great Emperor hurled from his throne by the victorious Allies on the field of Waterloo—the battle that should have been named “La Belle Alliance”—and the most that is claimed for this work is that it perhaps presents to the military reader how the campaign may be advantageously studied, with a view to extracting from it useful lessons that are applicable to modern warfare, for that is the real reason for all study of military history.



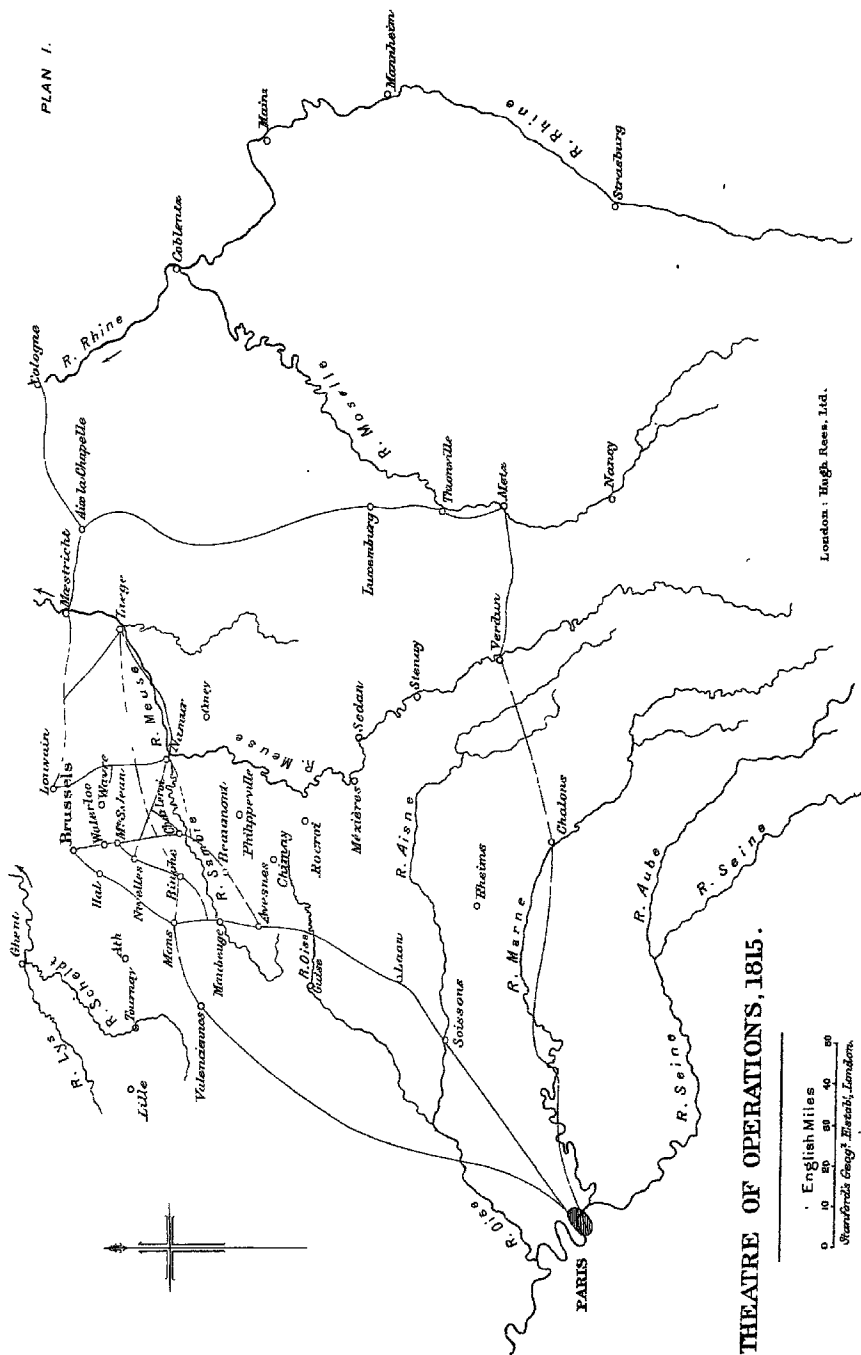
Inasmuch as the work is merely to supplement other and larger works, no copies of orders or detailed composition of the various armies are given ; for this information, under the circumstances, is assumed to be in the reader's possession already.

A. F. BECKE.

PUTNEY, S.W

*August, 1907.*





London: Hugh Rees, Ltd.

# THEATRE OF OPERATIONS, 1815.

English Miles  
0 10 20 30 40 50  
Stanford's Geog. Sheet, London.



# WATERLOO

## *Maps and Plans :*

Waterloo Campaign, 1815 <sup>1</sup>	. . . .	Map (in pocket at end)
Theatre of Operations, 1815	. . . .	Plan No. 1 (opp. p. 7)
Battle of Waterloo	. . . .	Plan No. 2 (opp. p. 72)

THE campaign of Waterloo is so well known, and the accounts and criticisms so numerous, that it is not proposed here to do more than give a brief outline of its principal incidents with a view to deducing therefrom some of the more important lessons that they convey. The Emperor had returned to France with the "violets in the spring" of 1815. Reaching Paris on March 20, he at once reconstructed the official machinery of the Empire, and set about reconstituting and raising as numerous an army as possible in such time as the Allies left him before they struck. His position was very different from that of former years, for in 1815 he had no ally ; and it was long before he dared let fall the odious word "conscription," for Louis XVIII.'s most popular act had been its abolition.

By the end of May 1815 Napoleon found the whole of Europe in arms against him. By strenuous exertions

<sup>1</sup> The scale of this map is based on the Belgian Survey; that of the map in Siborne's Atlas (and consequently of most of those maps which are based on Siborne's original) is incorrect. A good test distance is that from Charleroi to Binche. It is 20 *kilomètres*, or about 12½ miles.

he was able to place 200,000 men in the field, but, as he himself admits, 800,000 would have been required to oppose the allied forces once they effected concentration. By October 1 the Emperor reckoned he would have 800,000 men under arms, and with such numbers massed around his eagles anything might be possible. But the Allies did not give him the necessary time to make himself secure. The situation at this time was :—

*Wellington*, based on Ostend *via* Ghent with a possible alternative base at Antwerp, 93,000 of various nationalities, holding from the rivers Lys and Scheldt to the Brussels-Charleroi road.

*Blücher*, based on Cologne, *via* Liège, 116,000 Prussians, from the Brussels-Charleroi road to Namur, Liège and Cincy (see Plan 1).

Heavy Russian columns (150,000 strong under Barclay de Tolly) and 210,000 Austrians under Schwarzenberg were advancing on France, but as yet were still far distant.

The Army of Upper Italy (48,000 Austrians and Piedmontese) and the Austrian Army of Naples (25,000 strong) were to pass the Alps and advance on Lyons and Provence. The English Mediterranean Squadron was destined to co-operate in these operations.

To oppose these vast hosts Napoleon had 200,000 men between Paris and the Belgian frontier.

Wellington might have concentrated his forces and with Blücher advanced on Paris ; but political reasons, combined with the safer strategical course of awaiting his powerful Allies, imposed upon them the adoption of defensive strategy.

The dispositions in detail of the Allies in early June were :—

## WELLINGTON'S ANGLO-DUTCH ARMY

(See Map in pocket at end)

### *1st Corps*, Prince of Orange—

2nd Dutch-Belgian Division, Perponcher—Quatre Bras to Nivelles.

3rd „ „ „ Chassé—Rœulx to Binche.

1st British Division, Cooke—Enghien.

3rd „ „ Alten—Soignies, Mons, Rœulx, Braine-le-Comte, and Enghien.

### *2nd Corps*, Lord Hill—

2nd British Division, Clinton—Ath.

4th „ „ Colville—Oudenarde.

1st Dutch-Belgian Division, Prince Frederick of Orange—Grammont to Ghent.

Dutch-Indian Brigade, Anthing—Ghent to Alost.

### *Reserve Corps*, Duke of Wellington—

5th British Division, Picton

6th „ „ Cole

Brunswick and Nassau Contingents } Brussels and vicinity.

### *Cavalry*, Lord Uxbridge—

Main Body, Grammont—Ninove.

1st Dutch-Belgian Brigade Rœulx.

2nd „ „ „ Mons to Rœulx.

3rd „ „ „ Opposite to Maubeuge, and Beaumont.

Total about 93,000.

It will be noticed that Wellington's was a very miscellaneous array, comprising as it did British, King's German Legion, Hanoverians, Brunswickers and, weakest link of all, the Dutch-Belgians. Blücher's was a far more homogeneous force, and contained a good proportion of veteran Prussian regiments.

BLÜCHER'S PRUSSIAN ARMY <sup>1</sup>

*Chief of the Staff*—General Count Gneisenau.

*1st Corps*, Zieten. Head-Quarters, Charleroi.

1st Division, Fontaine l'Évêque.

2nd „ Marchienne, Charleroi, Gilly.

3rd „ about Fleurus.

4th „ Moustier—Namur.

Cavalry, Gosselies.

*2nd Corps*, Pirch I., Namur (Head Quarters), Heron, and Hannut.

*3rd Corps*, Thielemann, Ciney (Head-Quarters), Dinant and Huy.

*4th Corps*, Bülow, Liège (Head-Quarters) and Tongres.

Total about 116,000.

These scattered dispositions of the allied forces in Belgium have often been made the subject of unfavourable comment. No doubt this dispersion was strategically unsound, but it is possible that it was forced upon the allied commanders by the difficulties experienced in supplying their armies. Taking into consideration the strongly French tendencies of many Belgians, it was clearly important to deny Brussels to Napoleon. Consequently, from a purely strategical point of view, probably the best course for the Allies would have been concentration about Waterloo, with cavalry and advanced troops watching the frontier. But the widely divergent bases of the Allies forced upon them a more advanced position, and it only remained for them to make the best possible preparation for rapid concentration and to

<sup>1</sup> In Prussia at this time the term "Brigade" was applied to an organisation consisting of three Infantry Regiments each of three Battalions; each of the latter consisted of some 700 combatants.

Thus a Prussian Brigade was approximately the strength of a French Division. To avoid confusion, and following the lead of the great historians of this campaign, the term "Division," as being less misleading, has been allowed to take the place of the technically more precise nomenclature of "Brigade," for purposes of comparison.



avoid being surprised during the process of concentration. Should Napoleon advance he would certainly do so on one line, and the campaign would be a struggle between a single line and divergent lines of communication. In those days the means of intercommunication were so restricted that the preponderance of advantage lay with the single line, but the double line had, and has still, the great advantage that if the two armies can manage to combine on the battlefield the blow delivered is generally decisive. The facilities for intercommunication that now exist will remove many of the disabilities from armies acting on double lines, but the great advantage will remain. Fifty years later this was exemplified at Königgrätz in 1866, and the detrainment of Smith's brigade of the Valley Army on the battlefield of the First Manassas in 1861 may be regarded as another example.

But, as von Goltz says, whether the point of concentration for the units of the army should be selected according to the one principle or the other, must be left for the practised eye to discern from the situation, which is different on every occasion. It must, however, always be borne in mind that the object aimed at is not to seek the point of concentration according to the one method or the other by any hard-and-fast rules, but rather to accomplish one of the great ends of strategy, namely, to bring *all* the troops on to the battlefield so as to ensure their combined action. Each system responds to a distinct preceding state of affairs, and is not of arbitrary application. Further, although the divided advance generally promises greater success, for it leads

to the envelopment of the enemy on the battlefield, yet the advance in mass affords greater security against disaster; and he who is at a loss what to do should use it. To-day the attacker undoubtedly enjoys the advantage of single-handed leading, as against a divided command, in which two commanders have to arrange their joint action by means of the telegraph or in writing. This becomes difficult the more the attack comes as a surprise, or becomes critical, *i.e.* the more rapidly and energetically the other side acts. The point of contact of two independent armies will, as heretofore, be the objective for strategical penetration.

Two courses were open to Napoleon :—

(i) To stand on the defensive, manœuvring to gain time and to augment his numbers.

(ii) To seize the initiative, assume the offensive, and, by a vigorous onslaught on the most exposed of his foes, deal the Coalition a heavy blow.

With regard to these two possible courses, it will be admitted that when one belligerent is numerically greatly inferior to the other and he elects to concentrate and await attack, the inevitable result is that his opponents concentrate also and he finds himself inferior at the decisive point. But of the 645,000 entering France, 150,000 would have to be left to guard the communications and mask fortresses; and 75,000 were required for subsidiary operations. Thus the vast host ere it reached the Seine would have dwindled to 420,000. Against this array Napoleon could oppose 200,000 and the intrenched camp of Paris. He would repeat 1814, but with more than double the numbers he then had, and Paris to act as

a strong pivot of manœuvre and commanded by Davout, who could be reckoned on to the last extremity, as he had already proved at Austerlitz, Auerstädt, Eckmühl, and Hamburg. On the other hand, Napoleon might by adopting a vigorous offensive so skilfully manœuvre as to catch the enemy in the very act of concentration and be superior at the point of contact. On these grounds, therefore, the course first suggested should be rejected. No doubt these reasons in themselves would have been sufficient to induce Napoleon to adopt the second course, but in this case political considerations, the objections to leaving a third of his territory defenceless and to waging war in his own country, and the doubtful temper of the French people at that time, were not unimportant factors in the problem before him.

Again, the second plan was bolder, more worthy of his genius, and of the temperament of the French Army. Napoleon weighed these schemes carefully, and finally came to the conclusion that he would adopt the offensive.

Having made this decision, Napoleon had no difficulty in selecting which of his many foes he should attack. The only hostile forces within striking distance were those of Wellington and Blücher, and he accordingly aimed his blow at them. Further, reasoning correctly from the characters of his two opponents that if he did not soon attack them they would very shortly invade France, he decided to enter Belgium forthwith, and to beat in turn the English and the Prussians, long ere the Russian and Austrian hosts arrived. Delay would

be fatal. He now only had to decide where he would strike his first blows in the Belgium theatre. Three main lines of advance were available :—

(i) Lille-Tournay or Valenciennes-Mons, thus turning the Allies' right and cutting off Wellington from his base at Ostend.

(ii) The Allies' left might be turned by the Meuse and Namur, thus cutting off Blücher from his base.

(iii) He might advance direct on Brussels by Charleroi, thus piercing the Allies' centre.<sup>1</sup>

In order that the pros and cons of these three lines of advance may be properly appreciated, it must be remembered that Napoleon though superior to either Blücher and Wellington, was greatly inferior to them combined, for they outnumbered the French in the proportion of nearly two to one. Thus to meet them combined must be almost certainly fatal to Napoleon, and consequently it was of paramount importance to prevent any such combination. Now it is quite clear that if the Allies' right was turned, Wellington would be driven back upon Blücher. Similarly, if the Allies' left was turned, Blücher would be driven back upon Wellington. Consequently an attack on either flank would but bring about that combination which it was essential to prevent, and two days later the Emperor would find himself face to face with the united forces of the Allies. It is perhaps hardly necessary to repeat at this late stage that it was not Napoleon's custom to

<sup>1</sup> To appreciate these lines of advance the Theatre of Operation, 1815, Plan No. 1, should be attentively studied. This study throws considerable light on Wellington's nervousness for his right and his detachment at Hal on June 18.

drive allies together. This reason alone, irrespective of several minor considerations, was sufficient to indicate that an advance on the centre offered the best chance of success. Perhaps the most important of the minor considerations was the fact that both Blücher and Wellington would be aware of the extent to which their communications were exposed and, expecting their attack, would have made careful preparations accordingly.

After carefully weighing these points, and inspired by one of his finest strategical conceptions, the Emperor resolved to break boldly into the very centre of the enemy's cantonments, and to fall like a thunderbolt on the junction-point of the Allies near Charleroi.

It is now well known that Wellington, taking into consideration the proximity of the French frontier to his communications and the ease and rapidity with which Napoleon could have concentrated against them, believed and expected that Napoleon would advance from Lille or Valenciennes. It was, however, a notable feature of Napoleon's strategy that he, whenever possible, avoided the apparent and adopted the unexpected. It is a common saying that it is the unexpected that happens in war; but it is very nearly as accurate to say that it is the unexpected that succeeds in war. Certain it is that no student of Napoleon's campaigns can fail to be convinced that his skill in devising unexpected, but strategically sound, courses of action was, to a great extent, the secret of his numerous successes.

Returning to Napoleon's decision to advance by Charleroi, it has been shown that the principal reason for the selection of this line was the somewhat negative

one that the other two lines were inexpedient, but that was not by any means the only reason. Let us investigate the probable course of events as Napoleon would have foreseen them when making his plan. Let us suppose that he has effected strategic surprise and has launched his whole army on Charleroi. Now the Charleroi-Brussels road was the junction-point of the allied armies, and their two lines of communications ran practically in opposite directions from that road. Consequently it was only reasonable to suppose, arguing from the analogy of the conduct of allies in general, and particularly from that of the Austrians and Sardinians in 1796, that each would now fall back to concentrate on his own line of communications. If this happened, Napoleon would have been in the strategically advantageous position of having placed his army between two portions of the hostile army, each numerically inferior to himself and with sufficient "elbow room," provided they did so retire, to contain one and strike the other. It was a favourite manœuvre of Napoleon's to interpose between two hostile armies with his own force in three portions, two wings and a strong centre, each within easy touch of the other. He then reinforced his wings alternately with his centre, and thus defeated the two hostile armies in succession.

Meanwhile, by the use of a strong "containing force" he neutralised the independent will-power of that commander whom he designed to keep away from the battlefield where he himself would deal vigorous and decisive blows. But this central position is not one to be sought for, unless the commander who obtains it

is possessed of more than an ordinary amount of resolution. The irresolute general, so placed, merely vacillates ; doubt, that arch-foe to all success, grips him unceasingly ; the uncertainty as to whether he has chosen the right moment, and the right opponent, will nip all his operations in the bud. Thus only generals of great determination can successfully use the central position.

Further, for the general so situated suitable distances are of paramount necessity, and moderate dimensions are required. For one of the detached divisions must be fully accounted for ere its ally appears on the spot to succour it : and further, the disseminated parts must not be lost sight of. Thus we get the rule that if the detached groups are nearer together than two full days' march they can hardly be separately defeated, and a great risk is run of being caught between the enemy's forces as they concentrate on the battlefield itself, thus bringing about the envelopment of the force in the central position. Nowadays the longer range of firearms and their greater retaining power make it increasingly difficult to ensure the speedy annihilation of the selected division of the enemy's army which is the special object of attack. And it must be remembered that the belligerent operating upon the inner lines is only advantaged by a complete victory on the field, for pursuit will almost always be impossible. He must look out for his other opponents.

But supposing Blücher and Wellington did not fall back to concentrate on their own communications, then their only other course was concentration on their inner flanks to oppose his advance on Brussels. Napoleon, well served by his cavalry and by spies, was aware that

Blücher could concentrate on his right 24 hours earlier than Wellington could do so on his left, as a glance at the dispositions previously given will make clear. Consequently Blücher might well be attacked and defeated before Wellington could complete concentration. It would appear, therefore, that an advance by the Charleroi-Brussels road afforded an excellent prospect of defeating the Allies in succession, whatever action they took. A last and not unimportant inducement to move by this road was that at Charleroi the frontier was only thirty miles distant from Brussels, whose political importance has already been noticed.

Napoleon, having arrived at his decision regarding his initial strategy and its method of execution, puts in practice perhaps the most essential of all the principles of war:—Concentration of all available force at the decisive point. Seven days sufficed for the almost unsuspected concentration of 125,000 men and 370 guns south of Charleroi, which is in itself a tribute to the genius of the commander and the ability and organisation of his staff. *A propos* of this concentration it is instructive to notice the particular precautions taken not only to conceal it from the enemy, but to actually mislead him. Napoleon, aware of the extreme caution of Wellington's personal character, thoroughly appreciated how nervous he would be for the safety of his exposed communications with Ostend. He accordingly played upon that nervousness, and by great activity with a few troops on his own extreme left endeavoured to foster the idea that he was concentrating there. Napoleon's action in this matter is a clear indication of the value



he set upon strategical surprise. In fact, throughout his campaigns, it is evident that he regarded the element of surprise as almost essential to success.

The French Army under Napoleon was organised and early in June 1815 disposed as follows (see Plan No. 1) :—

*Chief of the Staff*—Marshal Soult, Duke of Dalmatia

*1st Corps* Drouet, Count d'Erlon—Valenciennes.

2nd „ Count Reille—Avesnes.

3rd „ Count Vandamme—Rocroi.

4th „ Count Gérard—Metz.

6th „ Mouton, Count Lobau—Laon.

*Imperial Guard*—Paris.

*Cavalry Reserve*, Marshal Count Grouchy—Guise.

Marshal Ney, Prince de la Moskowa, was also available for high command in the Grand Army.

\*

The army, although too small for the purpose, was the finest that Napoleon had commanded since Friedland. It was entirely French, and composed almost solely of veterans. But there was a general want of discipline in it, much actual disloyalty, and a widespread feeling of insecurity.

Such an army can only achieve something through its leader, never by itself. For the real spirit of an army must never be confused with its temper. But what makes men readily obey orders that involve the endurance of danger, hunger and fatigue is the *habit* of obedience. Without this ingrained habit an army is knit together by really fragile bonds, and is liable to sudden panics. Discipline is the only thing that can save an army at the end of a lost battle ; by its aid men instinctively cling together, for they realise that in concentration alone can any security be found. Armies

which lack discipline, when defeat stares them in the face, break up into flying mobs of played-out rubbish and drift away from the battlefield impossible to rally, and incapable of further effort. As war is the playground of fortune, and every battle cannot be a victory, so every army needs Discipline to enable it to survive something more than the mere shocks of combat. As the late Colonel Henderson has written, "obedience is not an instinct, and good-will is but an inefficient substitute for the machine-like subordination of the well-disciplined regular."

Although all the rank and file of the Grand Army started for the frontier in a state of fierce enthusiasm, and one and all were fanatical adherents of Napoleon's, yet many of the senior officers took the field with a presentiment of disaster, and a vision of the hangman's rope ever before their eyes in case of defeat. And although no army that the Emperor ever commanded fought with such truculent fury as that of 1815, yet the frame of mind of those senior officers who were already fatally compromised with Louis XVIII., although it might nerve them to acts of desperate courage, yet it could not assuredly strengthen their judgment in the hour of need. Never before had Napoleon handled an instrument of war at once so formidable and so fragile.

Secretly, stealthily, and very skilfully the French concentration south of the R. Sambre was carried out ; and on June 14, when the Emperor had massed his united force between Charleroi and Beaumont and was ready to deal his adversaries a staggering blow, the Allies were still widely scattered along the frontier from Ath to Liège.

It would take six days to concentrate the entire allied force on either flank, and three days for the Allies to draw together on to a central line. It was essential to Napoleon therefore to gain a three days' start of the Allies, or they would draw together and be ready for him ; and to meet them united would be almost certainly fatal, for they outnumbered him in the proportion of nearly two to one. He practically staked his Empire, therefore, on gaining the three days' start which was necessary in order to defeat the Allies in detail, or catch them *en flagrant délit* of concentration.

It will perhaps not be out of place to give here a brief narrative of the events of the campaign. Taking as a starting point June 14, 1815, the situation was—

*Allies.**Prussians—*

- 1st Corps, Head-quarters Charleroi.
- 2nd Corps, Head-quarters Namur.
- 3rd Corps, Head-quarters Ciney.
- 4th Corps, Head-quarters Liège.

*English—*

- 1st Corps, Quatre Bras to Enghien.
- 2nd Corps, west of Enghien to the R. Scheldt.
- Reserve, Brussels.
- Dutch - Belgian Cavalry on the Sambre.
- Heavy Cavalry, Grammont-Ninove.

*French.**French—*

- Left Wing, 45,000, north of Beaumont.
- Centre, 64,000, north-east of Beaumont, between Philippeville and Charleroi.
- Right Wing, 16,000, Philippeville.

Thus within ten days nearly 125,000 Frenchmen, separated by distances varying from 25 to 175 miles, had assembled on the frontier and were within easy cannon range of the enemy's advanced posts, before the Allies had taken a single defensive measure. The ground covered by the bivouacs of the French army

on this date did not exceed twenty miles in breadth by six miles in depth.

In contradistinction to the Emperor's concentrated forces the English and Prussians were still scattered along a front line extending over one hundred miles, and with an average depth of fifty miles.

## JUNE 15

*Allies.**Prussians—*

- 1st Corps concentrated on the line St. Amand-Ligny.
- 2nd Corps marched to Mazy.
- 3rd Corps reached Namur.
- 4th Corps, not realising the urgency of the case, did not move.

*English—*

Orders for *concentration at Nivelles* were issued. The divisions concentrated—

- 1st, Enghien.
- 2nd, Ath.
- 3rd, Braine-le-Comte.
- 4th, Grammont.
- Reserve Corps, Brussels.
- 2nd & 3rd Dutch-Belgian, Nivelles.<sup>1</sup>
- 1st Dutch-Belgian and Indian Brigade, Sottegem.
- Cavalry, Ninove.

*French.*

*Left Wing* (Ney) moved by Thuin and Marchienne and halted with its head at Frasnes and rear at Marchienne.

*Centre Column*, having crossed the Sambre at Charleroi, was in touch with the Prussian 1st Corps, but nearly half was still south of the Sambre.

*Right Column* halted astride the Sambre at Chatelet, its leading division at Gilly.

(Napoleon commanded the Centre and Right Columns in person.

Ney had reported to the Emperor at Charleroi a little after 3 p.m., and had been given the command of the Left Wing.)

Napoleon's movements on this day clearly show that his object on June 15 was to reach the Namur road at Quatre Bras and Sombrefe, thus completely dividing the Allies on the only road by which they could unite. At the close of the day Napoleon was actually the master

<sup>1</sup> Prince Bernard had already concentrated his brigade at Quatre Bras, on his own initiative. His ready assumption of responsibility should be noted. The presence of his weak force at Quatre Bras on the evening of June 15 saved this important place from falling into Ney's hands

of the whole of the ground on which the Anglo-Dutch array were to have met him, and his advanced guard had made good part of that marked out for Blücher.

Blücher had one corps on the intended ground ; two others near ; but the fourth was still far distant.

In halting Reille's Corps at Gosselies, Ney for the first time in his military career yielded to motives of prudence. But his action was most unwise. As for Wellington, he had not moved a man to meet the enemy ; and his concentration, as he ordered it, left the Charleroi-Brussels road practically open for Ney's advance, save for those few Dutch-Belgians who had concentrated at Quatre Bras without his orders. The Duke clearly under-estimated the rapidity with which Napoleon would strike when his Empire was at stake. It may truthfully be asserted that up to this time the balance of strategy was on the Emperor's side.

For the game was already won. It needed now only a continuation of that unsurpassed energy which had led Napoleon's battalions to the frontier, and a moderate loyalty and intelligence on the part of his lieutenants, to place the crown upon his strategy. In all the years from 1796 to 1815 his opponents had not learnt the secret, now so patent, of Napoleon's unrivalled success. Those students who are familiar with the Napoleonic campaigns will here say to themselves : " As at Montenotte, and at Marengo, and at Jena, Napoleon has once more won the campaign by a single stroke—the first stroke, the only stroke that counts. Henceforth nothing but ordinary energy and industry are required. His mass of men is there, ready to crack in twain the scattered hosts of the

Allies. The wedge is fast ; the succeeding strokes will come, quick and true. Nothing can save the Allies. The game is already won."

JUNE 16

*Allies.*

*English—*

Perponcher on his own initiative moved the 2nd Dutch-Belgian Division to Quatre Bras.

5th (Picton's) Division to Quatre Bras.

Cavalry to Quatre Bras.

Brunswick's Corps to Quatre Bras.

3rd (Alten's) Division to Quatre Bras.

1st (Cooke's) Division to Quatre Bras.

4th (Colville's) Division to Braine-le-Comte.

2nd (Clinton's) Division to Enghien.

1st Dutch-Belgian and Indian Brigade on Nivelles.

*Prussians—*

1st Corps at Ligny.

2nd and 3rd Corps reached Ligny, and all three were attacked there during the afternoon.

At night the retirement was—

1st Corps to Tilly.

2nd Corps to Gentinnes.

3rd Corps—Rear Guard to Gembloux.

4th Corps moving on Wavre, the head of Bülow's Corps reached Baudeset (NNE. of Gembloux, on the Roman Road).

*French.*

Ney in command of the French Left, consisting of Reille's and D'Erlon's Corps ; Ney moved Reille on Quatre Bras. Kellerman's Cavalry and the light horsemen of the Guard joined Ney.

Ney attacked Wellington at Quatre Bras with Reille's Corps and his Cavalry, and was repulsed.

D'Erlon moved to Frasnes, then to St. Amand and back again to Frasnes and Quatre Bras.

Napoleon with Centre and Right columns at 2 p.m. attacked the Prussian 1st, 2nd and 3rd Corps at Ligny, and obtained a tactical success. The Centre and Right columns bivouacked at Ligny.

Napoleon returned to Fleurus for the night.

At Quatre Bras, when darkness fell on the combatants, Wellington, thirty hours after his first warning, had only concentrated three-eighths of his infantry, one-third of his artillery, and one-seventh of his cavalry. During the night the belated divisions poured in ; but it was now

too late to crush Ney and reinforce Blücher, for the latter was already beaten and in full retreat. But the result of Ligny would have been far different if the Duke had been able to crush Ney's containing corps, in front of him, early on June 16, and had then marched for St. Amand. The reason why he failed to do so was the lateness of his concentration ; he had to fight Ney with the Brussels reserves almost unaided.

Quatre Bras, we may note at this point, was an important place ; for if the Prussians determined to fight at Ligny, then Quatre Bras was all-important. Further, Wellington's concentration would have been impeded by its loss ; his subsequent communication with Blücher would be rendered difficult, and co-operation at Waterloo improbable.

# JUNE 17

## *Allies.*

### *English—*

Covered by the cavalry, the whole Anglo-Dutch Army fell back on Mont St. Jean with the exception of the 4th (Colville's) Division and Dutch-Belgian and Indian Brigades, who moved to Hal and Tubize.

Cavalry and Horse Artillery combats took place during the day, as Wellington's rear-guard was pushed back by Napoleon's advance.

### *Prussians—*

1st and 2nd Corps by Mont St. Guibert on Wavre.

1st Corps crossed to the left bank of the R. Dyle at Wavre.

2nd Corps remained on the right bank of the R. Dyle.

3rd and 4th Corps reached Wavre, but remained on the right bank of the R. Dyle.

## *French.*

Grouchy with 33,000 was sent to pursue the Prussians at noon and reached Gembloux that night.

Napoleon about noon moved to Quatre Bras ; thence joining with Ney he pursued Wellington's retiring force, until the latter took position about Mont St. Jean.

Napoleon then proceeded to make arrangements for the battle on the morrow.

The delay of the French, the misappreciation displayed by Napoleon of the Prussian line of retreat, and the real nature of the hostile combination were errors pregnant with the gravest results. When the Emperor started at noon, Wellington was already retreating and the Prussians were assembling at Wavre ; whilst Grouchy was *outside* the Prussians. Napoleon had imagined the Prussians to be far more disorganised by their defeat at Ligny than they really were ; also he considered they would retreat due east to keep their communications open with Liège, whereas they had really marched due north. If Grouchy was blind, it must be admitted that on this day Napoleon did nothing to help him. This false hypothesis as to the Prussian movements had a result quite fatal to its framer on the very next day. Further, the initial advantage, gained in so masterly a fashion by the Emperor, was now well-nigh lost. For the Allies had managed to out-manceuvre their adversary, and their better strategy and his own mistakes during June 17 placed Napoleon at a fearful disadvantage in the struggles destined to take place on the morrow. Much depended on Grouchy's strategic initiative. But the unfortunate marshal realised the burden rather than the honour of his mission.

### JUNE 18

#### *Allies.*

The Anglo-Dutch Army, less the 17,000 troops at Hal and Tubize, accepted battle at Waterloo ; and, combined with the Prussians, the Allies were victorious.

Prussian movements were—  
4th Corps from Wavre through St.

#### *French.*

The whole French army, less Grouchy's Corps, attacked the Waterloo position. However, early in the day (by 2 p.m.) the Prussians appeared ; from then onwards they occupied a proportion of Napoleon's force,



*Allies.*

Lambert against the French right at Plancenoit.  
Part of the 3rd Corps opposed Grouchy at Wavre.  
2nd Corps followed 4th Corps then to Maransart.  
1st Corps by Ohain on Frischermont.  
The Prussians pursued the French. Zieten's and Pirch's Corps passed Maison du Roi.  
Bulow's infantry halted at Genappe.  
But Gneisenau, and a mere handful, continued the pursuit past Frasnes ere he drew rein.

*French.*

and in the end, hopelessly outnumbered, the French were defeated and routed.  
Grouchy attacked part of Thielemann's 3rd Prussian Corps at Wavre.  
The French army, routed, fled to Charleroi, and across the R. Sambre. Napoleon reached Charleroi at 5 a.m. on June 19.

Wellington's position was strong and well chosen. The lateness of Napoleon's attack, coupled with the tenacity of Wellington's soldiery, enabled the Duke to hold out until the Prussian advance made itself felt and finally helped Wellington late in the day to turn the scale and counter-attack the French, assisted by three Prussian Corps. This final blow, following on the repulse of the Imperial Guard, proved too much for the Grand Army, and it was soon transformed into a disorganised mob flying from the ill-fated field. In the general disorder the Grenadiers of the Old Guard retained, and even added to their laurels, for two battalions withstood the fierce attacks of two armies. In the allied dispositions there were two striking defects, namely the retention of the large detachment at Hal and Tubize (of which more later), and the tardiness of the Prussian advance, due largely to bad staff work.

Of the faults on the French side, on this memorable day, more will be said when the battle itself is considered.

JUNE 19

*Allies.*

2nd Prussian Corps attempted to intercept Grouchy, but failed. It attained Mellery.  
3rd Corps pursued Grouchy towards Namur.

*French.*

Napoleon reached Philippeville at 9 a.m.  
Grouchy drove back Thielemann at Wavre, but hearing of the result of Waterloo retired hastily to France by way of Namur and Dinant.

Having thus sketched in the brief diary we can now consider this short campaign more critically.

The invasion of Belgium was begun on June 15, but at the outset a serious hitch occurred. The march orders sent by Soult, Napoleon's Chief of the Staff, to Vandamme's Corps were entrusted to a single officer. This officer meeting with an accident *en route*, the message miscarried. In this little incident is to be seen some indication of the difference between the qualities required in a corps commander and a chief of the staff. Berthier had in previous campaigns been Napoleon's Chief of the Staff, but not now being available, Soult was appointed. Soult was one of Napoleon's most experienced and reliable Marshals, whether commanding a corps or in independent command, as in the Pyrenees in 1813; yet although as a general he was as much Berthier's superior as a man of action is the superior of a good clerk, yet nevertheless he was totally unfitted for the important post of Chief of Napoleon's Staff in 1815. Suchet would undoubtedly have been a better choice. For Soult had neither the necessary practice in this work, nor the industry requisite to get through the vast amount of work that had to be accomplished.

However, Soult did not initiate some of the malpractices which marred the work of the French Head-Quarter Staff in the Imperial Army of 1815 ; for, in 1807, Berthier sent a very important message to Bernadotte by a single orderly, the latter was captured, and his dispatch gave Bennigsen very important information.

Again, in 1809, at the passage of the Danube, before Wagram, Davout's and Oudinot's Corps were sent to the wrong bridges, and were compelled to cross each other's line of march. And other instances could be quoted. Further, we learn from the Duc de Fezensac (who served constantly on the French Staff between 1806 and 1813) that when a mounted messenger was wanted no one bothered to inquire whether he had a horse that could walk, even if the message had to go through at a gallop. Nor were inquiries made to see if he had a map, or even perchance knew the country.

There is no doubt that this habit of attempting everything, even in the time of Berthier, with the most feeble instruments, the wish to overlook impossibilities, and the unbounded assurance of success which had no doubt at first been advantageous, in the end became the undoing of the French.

Thus we may acquit Soult of initiating some of these malpractices. But we must remember that Berthier, as Chief of the Staff, helped to carry through many brilliant and decisive campaigns. Soult, on the other hand, as Chief of the Staff, assisted in but one, and that a disastrous campaign, and to this result he must be adjudged to have contributed more than his share. In the particular case under consideration, he was guilty of an elementary

error as a staff officer in not ensuring the delivery of an important order. It is related of this incident that Napoleon, having asked who carried the message and being told only one name, said, "Only one. Berthier would have sent six." But as we have seen, Berthier had been guilty of this very mistake in 1807. The result of the miscarriage of Soult's order to Vandamme was that at 6 a.m. the 3rd Corps, which should have marched at 3 a.m., had not moved. This, and the delays caused by the necessity of moving large bodies along bad roads, resulted in the loss of valuable time, and Napoleon's plans for the day's operations were only partially carried out. The point to notice is that faulty staff work will mar the most brilliant conceptions.

The actual fighting during the 15th was chiefly remarkable for Zieten's skilful withdrawal and the effectual check imposed on the French cavalry—in fact on Napoleon's entire army—by a few well-posted infantry, even in those days of slow-loading firearms.

It must not be overlooked that Zieten allowed the bridges over the R. Sambre to fall into the hands of the French both unmined and intact, when he was forced back. This fact is the harder to understand, because on the night of June 13 he had reported to the Prussian Head-Quarters the presence of two great hostile camps at Beaumont and Solre, and as a consequence had been ordered to send off his heavy baggage along the Gembloux road. This information which he furnished shows that he was not blind to the gathering danger-cloud that was so soon to burst, but it does not appear why he took so little pains to prepare for its near approach.

During the 15th Blücher had been rapidly concentrating under cover of Zieten's Corps, but the full effect of his concentration was marred by the miscarriage of orders, by which Bülow's Corps was absent from the field of Ligny and the battle lost to the Prussians. Turning to the Anglo-Dutch army, it is instructive to inquire why Wellington made practically no move on the 15th. The reasons seem to be that Zieten omitted to inform him of the French advance; and although rumours of firing about Charleroi did reach Head-Quarters, Wellington undoubtedly heard the details of the enemy's movements many hours later than should have been the case. But thanks also to the negligence of the officer commanding the British cavalry screen, Dornberg, on the line Mons-Tournay, who failed to submit his report until night, the Duke was ignorant whether the whole of the enemy's army was leading through Charleroi; or whether another column might be moving through Mons on Brussels. He was too cautious to commit himself to premature movements on unconfirmed reports, the more so as he believed the affair at Charleroi would prove to be only a diversion, and that the real attack would come on his own right. It is remarkable, however, that there was no organised system for the rapid dispatch of information from the outposts to Head-Quarters, especially as it was absolutely certain that Napoleon would make some sudden movement, the direction of which was quite unknown. And it is quite open to question whether Wellington was in his right place at Brussels on June 15. In those days there were no electric telegraphs.

The possibilities of the situation on the night of the

15th invite attention. Although the French centre and left columns were extended over twenty-three miles of road, still it was possible for Napoleon by 6 a.m. on the 16th to have occupied Fleurus with the bulk of his army and yet to have concentrated 40,000 men on the road to Brussels.

There is considerable divergence of opinion with regard to Napoleon's apparent apathy and want of decision on the night of the 15th. Many writers have attributed it to ill-health, but there does not seem to be sufficient ground for believing that illness had so far undermined his usual fiery energy, although it may be admitted that it was not so exuberant as of yore. However, whatever may have been Napoleon's state of health it did not seriously affect his activity. And in 1815 the Emperor was in sufficiently good health to enable him to bear the great fatigues of war, and also the fatigues incident to a bold offensive campaign. Moreover his brain had lost none of its power. It therefore seems more probable that there was some good motive for his temporary inactivity on June 15. Now the object of his strategy was the defeat of Blücher and Wellington in succession. Napoleon was aware that Wellington would take twenty-four hours longer than Blücher to concentrate. It was all-important that Blücher should be decisively beaten; for Napoleon could not advance with Blücher's undefeated army on his flank. Lastly Blücher's hatred of Napoleon, and his fiery, violent temper, made it certain that he would endeavour to concentrate and fight in preference to retiring. But if Napoleon pressed him unduly he would not be able to concentrate, and would be obliged to fall back. If Napoleon followed him, then Wellington

would have time to concentrate in rear of the French army, overwhelming the containing force. If Napoleon did not follow Blücher, then he would have the whole Prussian army threatening his communications with France. These arguments will show that Napoleon, in giving Blücher time to partially concentrate, in order that the main Prussian army might be dealt a decisive blow, was perhaps not so apathetic, or so strategically unsound as some of his critics have over-hastily assumed.

Hamley, in his *Operations of War*, dismisses the foregoing explanation of Napoleon's delay as absurd. He suggests that the true reason is to be found in the extension of the French columns over several miles of road and the consequent distance between front and rear. But Hamley has himself pointed out that it would have been quite possible for the French columns to have bivouacked in order of battle instead of in order of march, in which case an attack on the Prussians before Ligny would have been feasible at daybreak. Having regard to Napoleon's great military genius and experience of war, it is incredible that he was not aware of this opportunity of overwhelming a portion of his enemies, especially, as Hamley rightly says, when it is remembered that such operations were essentially characteristic of Napoleon's methods. It seems abundantly clear that Napoleon had some definite motive for his delay, and it is suggested that, for the reasons previously given, this motive is to be found in the necessity of dealing Blücher a heavier blow than the rout of merely one of his army corps. It is not suggested that Napoleon intended to permit the actual concentration of three corps, but it does seem

probable that he hoped to so time his blow as to involve the major part of the Prussian army in the rout of their 1st Corps. For it was essential that Blücher should be given time to concentrate a target large enough to ensure the maximum of effect from Napoleon's "man-killing machine," once the latter commenced operations. For it would naturally expend its energy to no purpose on a mere screen. This was an operation involving very delicate timing, in which he must be convicted of a miscalculation, for Blücher actually concentrated a superior force, to that opposed to him by Napoleon, in the battle of Ligny; but that the Emperor deliberately attempted it is but another instance of how readily great commanders accept risk when the situation demands it and great results are to be obtained.

Reliable information having assured Wellington that Napoleon's whole army was advancing by Charleroi, he ordered concentration at Nivelles.

*A propos* of the points, Nivelles and Ligny, selected by Wellington and Blücher for concentration, it is interesting to recall Napoleon's maxim: "It is a principle that admits of no exception that the concentration of an army should take place out of striking distance of the enemy." Clearly both Wellington and Blücher now violated this maxim, but it is a fair assumption that its truth was well known and understood by them both. It is a logical deduction, therefore, that special reasons existed for the selection of these points. Probably the most accurate of these lies in the fact that Wellington and Blücher had, in conference prior to the outbreak of hostilities, decided on these two points as



the most suitable in event of a French advance by Charleroi on Brussels. The wide divergence of the Allies' bases and the political necessity of denying Brussels to the French apparently forbade at the time the selection of points any farther north; and, at the time of the conference, it was hoped that sufficient warning of the French line of advance would be obtained to place both Nivelles and Ligny out of striking distance of Napoleon until concentration had been effected.

As it proved, Napoleon's advance was so sudden that there was not time for any fresh conference, and each commander loyally adhered to the scheme upon which they had previously agreed. Nevertheless but for miscalculations and false assumptions on the part of Napoleon, and inexplicable delays on the part of his lieutenants, the selection of these strategically unsound points for concentration would probably have led to disaster. As it was, Blücher, though acting with great promptness and decision, never did concentrate fully, and had Ney displayed his usual vigour Wellington might well have suffered a much worse fate. The difficulties and dangers of the Allies' situation on the night of the 15th bring very clearly to notice the military hazards imposed upon a commander when political considerations necessitate the passive defence of a long frontier and supply difficulties or, more usually, the terrors of a militarily ignorant population, forbid concentration.

But Wellington's and Blücher's plans, when all has been urged for them, are open to hostile criticism. Not so much, truly, for observing such a long line, but chiefly for the selection of Sombreffe and Quatre Bras

as their actual points of concentration. This selection was a strategical blunder, and particularly so when opposed to an adversary of such proven energy as Napoleon, for they could not be *sure* of being granted the time necessary for concentration ; and if caught in the act, they would certainly run the risk of being beaten in detail. Their arrangements would have been open to far less criticism had they selected Mont St. Jean and Wavre as the places of assembly for their widely scattered hosts ; for it is difficult to see how they could have been prevented from effecting their concentration unmolested at these spots. Both leaders had signally failed to foresee the Emperor's plan ; and dearly would they have paid for their neglect had Napoleon but possessed the exuberant energy of 1796. Napoleon's plan of campaign, and his opening move in June 1815, have been justly considered a model of perfect strategy.

Whatever justification may be found for Napoleon's pause before Blücher, there was none for Ney before Wellington. Ney's rôle was that of the containing force, but it was clear that if Wellington once effected concentration he would have little difficulty in overwhelming the French Marshal.

On the 16th the battles of Quatre Bras and Ligny were fought. The result of Ney's dilatoriness at Quatre Bras was that by nightfall he found himself opposed by superior numbers which he might earlier in the day have defeated in succession. An interesting point to notice with regard to Quatre Bras is Perponcher's initiative in bringing his division to Quatre Bras instead of to Nivelles. In this incident is exemplified the proper

use of discretionary powers by subordinate commanders, even to the extent of disobeying orders when it is certain that the superior authority giving the original order is unaware of important changes in the situation. The spirit of initiative in an army urges all to independent action. Clausewitz has summed up its value for us in the following sentence : " It is a sign of mediocrity to do always only exactly what one is required to do."

At Ligny Napoleon did not attack till 2.30 p.m., but he spent the morning in making a careful personal reconnaissance. Blücher had committed the tactical error of disposing his troops in full view of his opponent ; in fact had made little or no attempt at concealment either of firing line, supports, or reserves. The possible reasons that induced Napoleon to postpone his attack until the afternoon have already been indicated, but it is clear that he did not give Blücher sufficient credit for activity and energy. Wellington rode over and joined Blücher on the heights of Bry at 1 p.m. on June 16. Wellington and Blücher and their staffs then reconnoitred the French troops in their front. They all took the wing of Napoleon's army, then before them, for the whole of the Grand Army, and looked on any troops on the Quatre Bras side as a mere detachment. The Duke promised to come to Blücher's aid if he himself were not attacked, and he then returned to Quatre Bras. Wellington's promise was conditional, and could never be fulfilled ; for Ney found ample employment for all the British divisions as they successively reached Quatre Bras during that June afternoon. When the Emperor sent Grouchy forward at 2.30 p.m., he still believed that

only Zieten's Corps was actually in position, though he, no doubt, was aware that Pirch I. and Thielemann could not be far off, and hoped to involve them in the rout he anticipated. In point of fact, Pirch had arrived at 6 a.m. and Thielemann about midday, so that Napoleon was committed to the attack of superior numbers holding a position of their own selecting. The original scheme of attack was the turning of the Prussian right which was more or less in the air, thus shouldering them off the Namur chaussée. Finding the opposition strong and realising something of the true state of the case, Napoleon sent for D'Erlon's Corps, which was then marching on Quatre Bras, in rear of Reille's Corps, both under Ney. D'Erlon hastened to obey Napoleon's order to move against the Prussian right, but the message he sent to apprise Ney of the fact was delayed. During the afternoon Ney, hard pressed, wished to call up D'Erlon, and only then heard that he was marching on St. Amand. Not knowing the reason for this, Ney peremptorily recalled him. Meanwhile Napoleon had vigorously pressed his attack on the Ligny position, but had not made much headway. For although the Prussians had on more than one occasion been forced back from the villages they held, yet the indomitable old Prussian Marshal by constantly feeding his fighting line from his reserves won them back again every time. At 7 p.m., preparing the way by a heavy and concentrated artillery fire, Napoleon attacked the Prussian centre with the whole of his reserve, the Imperial Guard. The attack was successful; and by 9 p.m. Napoleon remained master of the field, while the Prussians fell

back, 1st and 2nd Corps on Tilly and Gentiennes, and 3rd Corps (rear guard) on Gembloux. The 1st and 2nd Corps passed the remainder of the night after the battle between Mellery, Tilly, and Gentiennes. They were halted on the two roads which, running to Wavre, join at Mont St. Guibert. The 3rd Corps passed the same night on the field of battle, but towards 3 a.m. it commenced to draw off towards Gembloux.

Gneisenau had actually ordered the direction of the retreat, for Blücher was disabled at the close of the battle of Ligny, and his Chief of the Staff assumed command. Reading his map, on horseback, by the light of the moon, Gneisenau gave the order "Retreat on Tilly and Wavre." These orders, intelligently and zealously followed out, changed the whole fate of the campaign. Wavre was selected as the actual rallying-point after Tilly and Gentiennes had been reached by Zieten's and Pirch's Corps.

At Quatre Bras—Ney, finally, repulsed at all points, withdrew, but remained in observation, and Wellington's force bivouacked on the battlefield. Wellington's failure to support Blücher at Ligny was really a necessary consequence of the deliberate, or overcautious, strategy which marked all the Duke's arrangements in the opening hours of this brief campaign.

Napoleon's success at Ligny may be ascribed to—

- (i) Blücher's faulty dispositions.
- (ii) The superior leading of the French subordinate commanders.
- (iii) The superior handling of the French artillery.
- (iv) The premature exhaustion of the Prussian reserves and the skilful and opportune use of the French reserve.

The strategical value of Ligny was entirely marred by—

(i) Ney's dilatory attack and consequent failure.

(ii) The well-known incident of D'Erlon's wanderings. As a result of faulty staff arrangements 26,000 men spent the entire day wandering about between two battlefields not ten miles apart without firing a shot in either. What reader of the account of the two battles fought that day can have any doubt as to the far-reaching effect on the subsequent course of the campaign the presence of D'Erlon's Corps on either field would have had? The execution on June 16 hardly came up to the great conception.

But had Napoleon's orders been strictly obeyed, and had his marshals acted with the energy displayed in former campaigns, there can be no doubt that Blücher would have been annihilated, and Wellington would then have had to bear the full weight of Napoleon's army alone on the following day. This clearly exemplifies the fact that strategic success is of no value unless followed up immediately by a decisive tactical blow, for the enemy recovers, and has time to meet the emergency.

One or two points in the tactics of these two battles may be remarked. At Quatre Bras the misuse of cavalry and its impotence against formed infantry are exemplified. Especially is the incident of the 44th Regiment in line driving off victorious cavalry interesting as indicating an early demonstration of the power of the firearm over the "arme blanche."

But the most interesting point in the tactics of Quatre

Bras is undoubtedly in connection with Ney's tardiness to attack that important position whilst it was still but thinly held. This is explainable, and in the following manner: Wellington in the Iberian Peninsula had administered so many rude rebuffs to the French marshals who were his opponents in that theatre of war, that he had somewhat shattered their confidence in themselves, and in their troops, to beat him. Rarely had they encountered so mysterious an enemy. For Wellington, when holding a defensive position, made no display of troops, and in most cases it had been very difficult for the attacking marshal to say whether the position was occupied in force, or whether he was about to waste his blow on a screen that would, at the critical moment, crumple up and evade his grasp. Consequently there had been nothing for it but to take the bull by the horns and launch the assaulting columns without any adequate preparation by fire, and hope for the best result. And these results had generally been so disastrous to the French, that eventually their marshals became rather chary of attacking the British at all. Thus the tactics displayed by Wellington in the Peninsula bore good fruit at Quatre Bras (on June 16, 1815), for even Ney hesitated to attack when that important position was very thinly held, and he himself stood in preponderating strength. That there were very few men and guns showing told the Marshal, after his Iberian experiences, nothing. For the whole Anglo-Dutch army might have been hidden away in the various valleys and woods, ready to deliver a strong counter-attack, if he incautiously committed himself to an assault on the

position. Hence the brilliant opportunity which really presented itself to him to crush Wellington's forces in detail as they reached Quatre Bras on June 16, and then, either to turn eastwards and assist his Emperor to surround and destroy Blücher or to lay open the way to Brussels by an immediate advance northwards. These opportunities were suffered to escape unutilised.

At Ligny, Blücher's dispositions on the forward slope, neglecting concealment and necessitating the exposure of his supports and reserves, were faulty. Wellington met Blücher on the heights of Bry on the morning of June 16 to concert plans for the future. It is said that when he was shown Blücher's dispositions and asked his opinion on them, he replied, "He will get damnably mauled." At this battle Napoleon put in practice his favourite tactical manoeuvre of keeping in hand a strong reserve with which to decide the fight when the issue hung in the balance. This manoeuvre on this occasion, and in fact generally, took the shape of launching the Imperial Guard at the enemy's centre late in the day. Once a hole in the opposing battle formation had been blown with the "case shot attack" from the massed French batteries, a large body of picked troops, quite fresh, hurled against a line weakened and exhausted by a long day's fight generally carried all before them. So in this case the Guard, advancing at 7.30 p.m., broke the Prussian centre, and in spite of desperate cavalry charges headed by the gallant but impetuous Blücher himself, decided the issue of the battle. But Napoleon's misconceptions as to the Prussian strength had cost him dear. True a tactical success had been gained, and the



opposing general wounded and all but captured, but at what cost? Very heavy had been his losses, and very great the exhaustion of his men. Worse still, the Prussians defeated were far from routed.

As for *Quatre Bras*, merely looked at from the tactical point of view, it was undoubtedly a severe check to Ney. But strategically it served Napoleon fairly well, since the Marshal Prince de la Moskowa had prevented Wellington sending off a man to Blücher's aid all day. On this day, thanks to Bülow's mistake and to Wellington's deliberation, the Allies put into the field forces actually less than Napoleon's Army. But nevertheless, owing to Napoleon's reserving Lobau, and particularly on account of D'Erlon's purposeless wanderings, the French fought with inferior numbers at both points of contact. Blücher undoubtedly suffered defeat owing to Bulow's absence and to Napoleon's superior tactics. But all the allied mistakes were redeemed by Gneisenau's bold order for the Prussians to retreat on Wavre. He risked temporary inconvenience to ensure that concentration on a decisive battlefield with Wellington that the Allies had so far missed. This magnificent piece of resolution snatched from Napoleon all the fruits of his tactical success at Ligny; and the danger which that success had momentarily averted was now left impending over him like a cloud that might burst at any moment, and when it did, would surely overwhelm him.

With reference to D'Erlon's wanderings it would be well now to say a few words. There is no doubt that much of the responsibility for this lack of co-operation is directly traceable to the Emperor. His orders to

Ney were not precise enough, for the Marshal was directed to push back the Anglo-Dutch, and then wheel up against the Prussian flank and rear. It was not sufficiently explained to Ney that if he merely contained Wellington, with Reille, such action would suffice, for D'Erlon would now be released to carry out the contemplated action.

Again Napoleon practically broke one of his three great maxims, for he attempted to outflank the Prussians with a corps which was really outside his direct control. But having decided on this course he should, directly he had commenced the battle of Ligny, have gone and personally led D'Erlon's Corps in its attack on Blücher's right rear; acting in this manner, nothing was left to chance. Soult could quite well have conducted the frontal attack on Blücher. Unfortunately the relations between the Marshal Duke of Dalmatia and the Marshal Prince de la Moskowa were somewhat strained, and it would have been hazardous to entrust Soult with leading D'Erlon's Corps.

But Ney is not blameless in the matter, for he should have realised that his recall order to D'Erlon was sent off far too late in the day for the 1st Corps to countermarch and reach Quatre Bras *in time* to render the Marshal any assistance. D'Erlon was placed on the horns of an awkward dilemma when he received Ney's order recalling him, but he again should have recognised that he could not reach Quatre Bras before dark; and being then well placed to assist the Emperor, he should at once have fallen on Blücher's flank. A decisive victory at Ligny would save Marshal Ney from any

disastrous consequence even if he had been defeated by Wellington.

The Emperor desired a decision on this day at Ligny, and he failed to get it, for no less than 30,000 of the French army took no part in the day's fighting. Consequently Blücher was merely pushed back, not destroyed. This day, too, saw practically the last smile the fickle goddess shed on the Emperor. It was a saying of his—"Fortune is a woman; remember that when she offers you a chance, because you cannot be certain that she will repeat her offer to-morrow." Unfortunately for himself he did not act up to this excellent advice, and the chance which fortune offered to him of destroying one of his opponents was allowed to escape.

The activity of Wellington and the dilatoriness of Napoleon on the morning of the 17th afford a striking contrast. The former at daybreak reconnoitring personally, collecting sure information and acting accordingly; the latter taking tardy measures to obtain information, and acting on conjecture, thus violating his own maxim that war is not a conjectural art. Not until 8 a.m. were orders issued to Ney; and it was nearly noon ere Grouchy was dispatched with 33,000 men in pursuit of the Prussians. This apparent want of appreciation of the value of time is perhaps the most noticeable feature of the campaign, and no doubt the overwhelming disaster at Waterloo was directly traceable thereto. But Napoleon appreciated the value of time as well as any one, and it is suggested that it was his wrong assumption that Blücher would not leave his communication with Liège, and the consequent false conceptions based thereon,

and also the fact that the situation at Quatre Bras was still obscure, that led Napoleon into waste of valuable time. But even so, it was necessary to ensure Blücher's acting in this fashion, and to prevent his force shaking itself together. A relentless pursuit directly after the victory should have been commenced. But Napoleon returned to Fleurus for the night without giving any orders for pursuit of the Prussians, and moreover told Grouchy that he would issue these orders on the morrow. This was not the Napoleon of Austerlitz and Jena. After Ligny there was perhaps some necessity for delay. Men are not machines, and the heavy marching and severe fighting had made a short rest imperative. The expenditure both of life and ammunition during the battle had been very severe, and some time was necessary for reorganisation and replenishment. Napoleon assumed that Blücher was in full retreat on Liège : if that were so, the morning of the 17th was a favourable opportunity to permit the much-needed rest, especially as the proposed operations against Wellington would inevitably demand very great exertions from the troops. But the Imperial Guard and Lobau's Corps were still quite fresh, and had practically no ammunition to make up, and consequently early on the 17th they might have been directed on Quatre Bras, to co-operate with Ney and crush Wellington. Rapid action was a necessity for the Emperor, for in dealing with two opponents, each nearly as strong as himself, there was the ever-present danger that he might get jammed between them and destroyed, as indeed happened on the next day at Waterloo. In suggesting the above move we assume that the Emperor

should follow, as indeed he actually did, the analogy of his brilliant campaign of 1814. For in 1815 he threw his concentrated force first upon one opponent, and then upon another, making a brilliant use of their initial mistake in disseminating so widely, and then attempting concentration within his reach ; and thus his plan, in 1815, resembled that of 1814. But in both years his brilliant strokes failed to save him. And the following suggestion as an alternative in execution is worth consideration : If in 1814 instead of turning from Blücher on to Schwarzenberg, and in 1815, instead of turning from Blücher on to Wellington, what would in each case have happened had the Emperor tried another and *immediate* blow at Blücher, and followed him until he was destroyed ? This might well have changed the course of both campaigns. In each Blücher was the enterprising spirit, and the more irreconcilable adversary. Schwarzenberg, in 1814, was weak and irresolute, and Wellington, in 1815, was, strategically, over-slow and over-cautious. In each case Blücher unaided must have succumbed to the Emperor's repeated sledge-hammer blows, as he did in 1806. Blows, too, gain in effect by constant and ceaseless repetition. With Blücher destroyed, the whole combination might well have collapsed. Was not 1796 a safer model to follow than 1814 ?

But to return to the events which actually occurred. Although Napoleon's delay after Ligny may have been due to both necessity and design, it is far more difficult to explain his neglect in the matter of the pursuit of Blücher's army. No man knew better than he the value

of the pursuit, both tactical and strategical, yet he is found at the crisis of the campaign letting valuable hours slip by, and permitting a beaten foe to withdraw unmolested. The fatigue and exhaustion of the troops have been advanced as the reason for this neglect, but it is scarcely conceivable that he could not have found some means of at any rate keeping touch with his beaten enemy. Napoleon's whole conduct indicates a calm assurance as to the course Blücher would adopt. But Napoleon here failed to take sufficiently into account the character of Blücher. The latter was dominated by a violent hatred of Napoleon ; and Fortune was now offering to the Allies the chance of perhaps crushing the French between the two jaws of a vice. The prospect was too alluring to neglect, and both Blücher and Gneisenau determined to see the matter through despite difficulties and annoyances. One of the secrets of Napoleon's ill-success in this campaign seems to lie in the foregoing reason ; for he had rightly enough appreciated the potent military considerations that would induce a Prussian retreat on Liège, and also the fiery and impetuous features of Blücher's character that made an early combat at Ligny so probable, but he had not appreciated Blücher's indomitable resolution, so ably backed by Gneisenau ; and the failure to do so, and the failure to keep in close touch with the Prussians, at this critical stage of the campaign, and thus get early and precise news as to their plans, was fatal.

Very different use was made of the morning of the 17th by the Allies. By 8 a.m. Wellington and Blücher, well informed as to their own and the enemies' dis-

positions, had their movements for the day well in hand. Blücher's shattered forces shook themselves together at dawn on June 17. They had withdrawn from the battlefield on the previous night, covered by Thielemann's Corps, and all now fell back on Wavre; and Wellington retired later on Waterloo. A feature of this retirement was Uxbridge's handling of his cavalry and horse artillery, a useful object-lesson in the combined action of these arms. Grouchy's wanderings and the scanty information he obtained exemplify the penalties attending the issue of orders instead of instructions to commanders of detachments when the position and intentions of the enemy are doubtful. But Napoleon's misdirections to Grouchy do not excuse the indifferent and negligent scouting of the latter's cavalry commanders.

Throughout the whole of the operations of June 17 and 18 Grouchy's conduct is characterised by a want of real resolution. He was in possession of 5,000 cavalry, and with this force, capable of more speedy movement than the other arms, the slow progress of the head of his advance is unaccountable. Above all things, information was required; and for such purpose ample means were provided. A Marshal of France, entrusted with 33,000 men, for a distinct strategic purpose, is supposed to know his duty without instructions that would be required by a subaltern. No doubt the Emperor was under a false impression, but it was Grouchy's duty to have corrected this.

A question often asked, and about which there has been some controversy, is—"Was Wellington right to stand at Waterloo?" It has been urged that he knew

his ally Blücher had practically severed himself from his communications, and that therefore by standing to fight he exposed himself to the risk of defeat, and Blücher to the risk of ruin. Now it is clear that the whole question turns upon the point—Had Wellington sufficiently good reasons to believe that Blücher could and would arrive in time to participate in the battle? If Blücher did so arrive, then the Allies had accomplished that great strategical desideratum of two allied armies on divergent bases, namely, of combining *on the battlefield*.

Very careful inquiries have been made with respect to the communications that passed between Wellington and Blücher on the 17th; and it is now certain that Wellington and Blücher were in communication, for a Prussian officer reported to Wellington at about 9 a.m. on June 17, having ridden over from Mellery. He had been sent by Gneisenau to inform Wellington of the intended Prussian concentration at Wavre, and to inquire what Wellington meant to do. Wellington responded that he would offer a defensive battle on the Mont St. Jean position if he could be supported by at least one of Blücher's army corps; but if not, he would have to abandon Brussels and retire over the R. Scheldt. The Prussian orderly officer at once returned, with this message, to the Prussian Headquarters. When to this is added Blücher's well-known message received by Wellington at Waterloo at 2 a.m. on the 18th, which ran: "Bülow's Corps will set off marching to-morrow in your direction at daybreak. It will be immediately followed by the corps of Pirch I. The 1st and 3rd Corps will also hold themselves in readiness to proceed towards you. The exhaustion of



my troops prevents my making any earlier movement," there can be little doubt that Wellington was sufficiently well informed as to Blücher's movements and intentions, and that by standing at Waterloo he took no greater risk than is inevitable in all combined operations. Many minor pros and cons on this point have been brought forward by different writers, but most of these ignore the importance of the principle of strategy that aims at the combination on the battlefield of armies operating on divergent lines. Among these other considerations, it is perhaps desirable to mention the political necessity of the defence of Brussels, which, it cannot be denied, could not now, at this stage of the campaign, be attempted elsewhere than on the Mont St. Jean position. Moreover, the capabilities of this position were not unknown to Wellington. He had previously pointed it out as the position he would select for the defence of the Belgian capital; and therefore his decision to fight at Waterloo was founded on a certain knowledge of the extent of the tactical hazard entailed.

On the night of June 17-18, Napoleon and Wellington remained facing each other about Waterloo. The Emperor by means of a masterly reconnaissance in force, late on the afternoon of June 17, discovered that the whole of the Anglo-Dutch army had taken position on the plateau of Mont St. Jean. Blücher was at Wavre, and Grouchy having at last discovered Blücher's true position, halted in and around Gembloux for the night. During this night Napoleon displayed considerable anxiety lest Wellington should continue his retirement and escape him, and he personally visited his outposts. The

spectacle of the French Emperor visiting his own outposts is evidence of the importance that great commanders of the past attributed, and rightly so, to personal reconnaissance.

The dispositions of Wellington and Napoleon on the morning of June 18 afford some contrast. The former, leaving nothing to chance, places 17,000 men at Hal and Tubize to guard his right flank. The latter, taking his hypotheses as facts, leaves his right flank unguarded, except for a detachment made in accordance with theories that all the information available tended to disprove. But on the other hand Napoleon, as was his custom, concentrated every available man for the battle.

It is right here to speak plainly of the strategic error, with which Wellington is charged, of leaving some 17,000 men, under Prince Frederick of the Netherlands, at Hal and Tubize (at this latter place, on the way to Hal, Colville's two brigades were halted). Ever anxious about his communications with the sea, and fearing that a French corps might turn his right, he committed the strategic blunder of sending a body of men on the eve of a great battle to parry an imaginary danger. The presence in line of battle of Colville's brigades might well have kept the British line from that critical hour which occurred before Zieten came up. It is inconceivable that Wellington should have credited his adversary with a plan of operations that must, by forcing him into Blücher's arms, have brought about an immediate allied concentration, for from the very outset Napoleon had been evidently manœuvring to prevent such a junction.

Returning to Grouchy's force, it is again noticeable that many of the hostile criticisms are founded on a misconception as to how the situation appeared to Napoleon, and also as to the duties of a containing force. Napoleon knew that Blücher, though defeated, was not crushed, and consequently detached Grouchy to contain him. As Blücher was greatly superior in numbers to Grouchy the detachment cannot be objected to on strategical grounds, especially as his presumed line of retreat was such that if not contained he would be able to reorganise and advance against the French communications, and cut their line of retreat, in a few days. During the night of the 17-18th, Napoleon heard from Grouchy enough to have made it clear that his presumption as to the Prussian retreat was false. Why did he not recall Grouchy? It is suggested that a very good reason is to be found in the presumption that the vigorous attack of 33,000 victorious troops on the rear of a defeated army of 80,000 would probably suffice to detain that army at the spot where it was attacked, or else to turn orderly retirement into hasty retreat. Consequently there is something to be said in favour of Grouchy's attack on Wavre. Moreover, the capture of Wavre conferred considerable strategic advantages on Grouchy as it placed him within easy striking distance of Louvain, through which place ran Blücher's last line of communication with Cologne. Numerous other points for and against Grouchy's action have been brought forward by various historians, but enough has been said to show that in the light of what was then known there is much to be said in favour of the course actually pursued.

But the execution again was not equal to the conception. Grouchy failed his master at a critical hour. At least, on advancing on Wavre, it would have been prudent to have crossed to the Dyle's left bank at Mousty, so as to ensure the safety of his communications with the Grand Army. As it was, fruitless hours were spent forcing the Dyle passages, during the afternoon, against Thielemann, who fought stubbornly to prevent the crossing taking place. Again, with the cannon of Waterloo thundering in his ears at Walhain, although there might be no mistake regarding the tenour of the instructions he had received, yet the fact was becoming every moment more palpable that these instructions were based on a false hypothesis.

Before the Marshal's troops closed up, he was aware that the bulk of the Prussians were at Wavre ; and at the same moment there could have been no doubt in his mind that the Emperor was heavily engaged at Mont St. Jean. The roar of the cannon, every moment becoming more insistent, and reverberating over Brabant, proclaimed this fact with ever-increasing clearness. Grouchy now simply had to examine the possibility of the Prussians manœuvring towards Wellington. The probability was that they would ; what otherwise could have been their object in abandoning their proper line of communications, or in Wellington's offering battle at Mont St. Jean? If this were so, a further advance on Wavre would be directly opposed to the *spirit* of the Marshal's instructions from his Emperor. Therefore, taking all this into account, it will probably be considered that Grouchy evinced a lack of those qualities

required in an independent commander. Generally, as the Prussians exemplified in 1870, it is a fairly safe rule to follow—when in doubt march to the sound of the cannon.

On the morning of the 18th, after a very wet night, Napoleon did not immediately attack, but occupied himself till 11 a.m. in making a careful personal reconnaissance and in holding his last review. At that hour the dispositions of each side, briefly stated, were (*vide* Plan No. 2):—

*Anglo-Dutch.*—In Hougoumont, 1,200 to 1,400 men. The garrison was composed of a detachment of the British Guards, one battalion of Perponcher's men, and some Hanoverians.

In La Haye Sainte, 376 men of the K.G.L., under Major Baring.

The Sand Pit was held by a detachment of the 95th Rifles.

In the enclosures on the left, Smohain, Papelotte and La Haye, 3,200 men, of Saxe-Weimar's Brigade.

In the hollow road were 1,200 men, the whole making a strong outpost line of about 6,000 men. This line may be also regarded as a "false front" to the true position. However, it must not be forgotten that La Haye Sainte was the key to the whole position.

The main position, extending along the northern ridge from the Nivelles road to the Farm of Smohain, was held by 31,000 men in two lines—the first line 16,000; the second line 15,000; both lines concealed from the French by the crest of the ridge.

The position of Bylandt's Dutch-Belgians must be

excepted; for this brigade was unaccountably posted down the forward slope, and thus became subjected to a terrific fire from the French Great Battery, at horse-pistol range, ere D'Erlon's attack was delivered. Its *moral* became so sapped that, on the French advancing to the attack, it broke and fled to the rear in considerable disorder.

Reserves, 13,000 infantry, were placed in rear of the right and centre.

Two brigades of Light Cavalry (those of Vivian and Vandeleur) were in rear of the left flank.

The two Heavy Brigades (of Somerset and Ponsonby) were astride of the Charleroi road.

Two brigades and two regiments of Light Horse were in rear of the right, in the angle between the Charleroi road and the Nivelles road, and, together with some five brigades of cavalry, were attached to the reserve.

Picton commanded the left, the Prince of Orange the centre, and Hill the right of the line of battle.

The artillery was divided more or less into three portions: 50 guns along the front of the position; 50 guns on the right of the position on the hill above Merbe Braine; 50 guns with the reserve, this latter including 16 guns that arrived during the action. Besides these there were 6 guns with the cavalry on the left. (This was Gardiner's Troop of R.H.A. attached to Vivian's Cavalry Brigade.) Thus the army that Wellington concentrated on the Mont St. Jean position, with which to offer a defensive battle to the Emperor, was about 67,000 strong, and it included some 12,000 horse and 156 guns. We have already dealt with the

detachment he maintained at Hal and Tubize, and consequently need not refer to that matter again here.

Napoleon's force was disposed :—

Right Wing, 16,000, under D'Erlon, Charleroi road nearly to Frischermont. Left Wing, 15,000, under Reille, from La Belle Alliance to the Nivelles road. In the centre two divisions of Lobau's Corps, 6,000, on the Charleroi road. In reserve, the Imperial Guard, 12,000, astride the Charleroi road, and in rear of the centre.

*Cavalry*.—One division (Jacquinôt) on the right flank ; one division (Piré) on the left flank. In rear of the Right Wing, Milhaud's Corps. In rear of the Left Wing, Kellermann's Corps. The Light Cavalry of the Guard (Lefebvre-Desnouettes) were in rear of Milhaud ; the Reserve Cavalry of the Guard (Guyot) were in rear of Kellermann. Two divisions of cavalry (those of Domon and Subervie) were with Lobau's infantry in the centre, but on the east of the Charleroi road. The artillery numbered 246 guns : 84 in front line, 36 with the cavalry, 30 with the infantry in the centre, and 96 with the Guard in reserve. Thus Napoleon had gathered for the assault of Wellington's position some 74,000 ; this force included some 15,000 cavalry and the 246 guns already mentioned.

These dispositions throw some light on the reasons for Wellington's retention of Colville at Hal. They clearly show that Wellington regarded his right as the probable flank to be attacked. Having regard to the direction of his line of communication with Ostend, his right was certainly his strategical flank ; but, on the other hand,

it was undoubtedly to Napoleon's interest to keep Blücher and Wellington apart, which could best be effected by turning the English left.

But Wellington's dispositions, even at this advanced stage of the campaign, bear clear traces of the fact that he still feared an advance by the French through Mons and Hal to Brussels. 'Thus only can be explained the strong detachments at Hal and Tubize, and the large accumulation, chiefly consisting of his choicest troops, on his right flank.

The only other mistake which can be urged against him in his preparation to resist the impact of Napoleon's onslaught, and to give sufficient time to allow the Prussians to bear their part in the great battle, was the slight garrison provided for La Haye Sainte, and the inadequate steps taken to fortify it. The place was suitable for a garrison of 1,000 strong; and being the key to the Duke's left centre, and covering, too, a vulnerable point in his line, its importance should have been recognised. As it was, its fall in the late afternoon brought about that critical hour which might well have unnerved a less resolute commander than Wellington.

In all other respects his position was most skilfully taken up, for his forces were so arrayed that hardly any of the defenders were exposed, and the reserves were well shielded. In fact it was the converse of the Ligny position, where the Prussian reserves had been exposed to Napoleon's eye, and many of them to his artillery fire, long ere they were brought into action. To ensure further cohesion in his miscellaneous array, Wellington (to support the various allied contingents)



placed them alternately along the line with his own national troops interspersed between them.

Of Napoleon's Grand Army, the last one of the Empire, every man was visible from the allied position. The Emperor's plan of battle, too, was as simple as the array of his troops, for it contemplated nothing more and nothing less than smashing in the allied centre with a tremendous frontal attack.

Whilst Wellington was inspecting his position, Muffling was meanwhile engaged in making the final arrangements for the Prussian co-operation. The scheme, for each of the three probable cases that might arise, was as follows:—

(i) Should Wellington's right be attacked, the Prussians should march to Ohain and support the Duke.

(ii) If the centre, or left, were selected for attack, then one Prussian corps would march through St. Lambert and Lasne and outflank the French right; and another body would move by Ohain and support Wellington.

(iii) Should the French advance on St. Lambert, then the Prussians would receive the attack, whilst Wellington operated on the French left flank and rear.

About 11.30 a.m. Napoleon was seen to be directing his attack, presumably against the allied centre, and a message was sent forthwith to Blücher that the second case was occurring, and asking for the Prussian help as arranged. Muffling, having just been informed that Bülow led the Prussian advance from Wavre, directed his A.D.C. to show Bülow the letter he was sending on the matter to Blücher. But the indomitable old man himself was in the forefront of the advance, and he proceeded forthwith to take the needful steps.

Napoleon's review of the Grand Army before the action opened was destined by the Emperor to encourage his troops and impress his adversaries, who were holding the opposite ridge, only some 1,500 yards away. As the grey-coated figure of their Emperor rode down the serried ranks of his battalions, the enthusiasm of his men burst all bounds, and, in the madness of their adoration of the victor of a hundred fights, and particularly of the victor of Ligny, and Wellington's pursuer of the day before, they made the welkin resound with their shouts, and from end to end of their close-packed lines rang out the great cry "Vive l'Empereur!" a cry both calculated to do homage to the god of modern war, and to strike terror into the hearts of all but the boldest of their enemies.

At 11.35 a.m. the great battle opened, and Napoleon directed his first attack against Hougoumont, for this post would enfilade his attacks on the English centre. This, however, was only a side issue.

The French artillery was formed in two large batteries, one of 50 guns directed against Hougoumont, the other of 80 guns along the ridge north-east of La Belle Alliance, directed against the left centre of the allied line. Under cover of this artillery fire and supported by Piré's cavalry on the left, who demonstrated against the British right, the French left attacked Hougoumont, but were repulsed. In the meantime preparations were completed for the attack of the British left centre and left, and Napoleon ordered another effort against Hougoumont to be combined with the attack of the French right wing.

Before launching his attack on the allied left centre, the Emperor cast his eye round, and saw a dense black cloud emerging from the woods of Chapelle St. Lambert. That these were Prussians there was soon no doubt. It was now 1.30 p.m. A prisoner brought in confirmed the fact that this was Bülow's Corps marching to Wellington's aid. Napoleon now ordered Lobau's Corps and the light cavalry to watch Bülow's advance. He had no idea of ordering a retreat; he was ruined if he failed to beat Wellington that afternoon. But Bülow's arrival was most inopportune for him, for it reduced by 10,000 men the army destined to overwhelm Wellington. Matters were now fast becoming critical for Napoleon. Would Grouchy act with wisdom and initiative? If he did, all might yet go well. *But if he failed to either co-operate early with the Grand Army, or at the least to keep away two of Blücher's corps from the field of Waterloo, then all was lost.* However, Napoleon determined to make what use he could of such time as was allowed him, and to *attempt to overthrow the British ere Blücher arrived in force.* Ney was, therefore, now ordered to attack the British. Its advance prepared by a hurricane of fire from the Great Battery, D'Erlon's Corps led the way.

The French left corps was again repulsed at Hougoumont, but their right drove back the Dutch-Belgian Brigade in the left centre of the British first line, and D'Erlon's Corps engaged Picton's Division. Whilst the fire fight was raging between Picton's Division and D'Erlon's Corps, and the smoke enshrouded the combatants, there opportunely arrived on the scene the Household Cavalry Brigade and the Union Brigade. The

latter brigade attacked the flanks of the French columns, the former the French cavalry. The Union Brigade, after overthrowing the French infantry, and drunk with the exhilaration of their success, galloped madly up to the French position and charged the Great Battery. Napoleon, seeing this, hurled on the impetuous and disorganised horsemen cavalry from right and left, and swept them home again with fearful loss. But in the meantime D'Erlon's great attack had actually melted away ; and, more important, the key of the allied position, La Haye Sainte, was still in the hands of its intrepid defenders.

Napoleon, fully realising that he could not draw off now and wait for Grouchy's arrival, for he would have then been greatly outnumbered by Wellington and Blücher, now resolved to make a fresh attack on the British ere Bülow could engage.

At 3.30 p.m. Ney was ordered to storm La Haye Sainte with the least injured of the regiments of D'Erlon's Corps. This attack failed. Towards 4 p.m. the cannonade of the allied line became violent in the extreme, and this was the prelude to the charge of 5,000 veteran horsemen composed of Milhaud's Cuirassiers and the Light Cavalry of the Guard. These squadrons were hurled against the allied infantry squares along the British front between the two farms of La Haye Sainte and Hougomont : which latter had just again been attacked by the French right.

With the advance of the horsemen a perfect hurricane of fire rent the air. All the British guns, except those of Mercer's gallant troop, were taken, for, acting on the

Duke's orders, the gunners had retired into the squares after firing the last shot ; but ere they did so their last discharge had torn many of the squadrons to pieces. However, the capture was of no avail to the French, for they failed to remove a single piece ; nor did they hurl any down into the sunken road, nor even break the sponge staves, nor carry them away, nor even spike the captured guns with their pistol ramrods. The gallant allied infantry held their own, but the French round shot made sad havoc of the squares. Finally Lord Uxbridge hurled fresh squadrons against the Cuirassiers, and the latter gave way.

Napoleon watched the failure of his horsemen to break down the resistance of the allied infantry, and he too was watching the Prussian advance on his right. Ney, on Milhaud being driven back hopelessly disorganised, at 5.30 p.m. called up the rest of the reserve cavalry from the second line. These included Kellermann's Cuirassiers and the Heavy Cavalry of the Guard, altogether some 9,000 sabres. This splendid body of veteran horsemen now fell upon the crippled squares, and there followed an hour of confused *mêlée*. Every face of the rapidly dwindling blocks was attacked, but everywhere the horsemen failed to break in. But the stress was great ; and Wellington used up all his cavalry save the two brigades on his left wing, and gradually pushed all his reserves forward into the firing line. The squares sustained severe fire, and some even thirteen separate charges—a tribute, sufficient indeed, to their heroic discipline. The feeling of the rank and file is well exemplified by the words used by a British sergeant,

during the fury of the fight—"We shall see who can kill the longest."

Finally, failing to break in anywhere, the French horsemen withdrew and again surrendered the plateau.

Meanwhile the French left corps occupied the enclosures of Hougoumont, but this post was reinforced by two battalions, whose place on the British right was taken by the Brunswick battalions from the reserve.

The French cavalry charges might well have succeeded had they been immediately followed by infantry. But not until the horsemen had withdrawn were the Bachelu Division and one brigade of the Foy Division (Corps of Reille) hurled against the English. Unsupported, they were cut to pieces and forced back.

Meanwhile Blücher with Bülow had, at 4.30 p.m., reached the wood of Paris, only some 3,500 yards from Plancenoit. Wellington kept sending him urgent messages to engage; and Blücher now determined to unmask, and act with those troops that he had in hand. Lobau presented a determined front to his advance; but, pressed hard by 30,000 Prussians, his 10,000 gradually gave ground. Disputing every inch, Lobau was pressed back through Plancenoit; but Napoleon, now seeing his line of retreat threatened, reinforced Lobau with Duhesme and the eight battalions of the Young Guard. These fresh troops acted with energy, dislodged the Prussians, and cleared the village. Bülow's last reserves had now been used up, but he had not so far influenced the fate of the battle. This was hardly the support that Wellington counted on when he offered battle at

Mont St. Jean. But fortunately at this crisis the corps of Zieten and Pirch I. drew near.

About this time one of Thielemann's aides rode up and reported to Blücher that his general was hard pressed at Wavre by superior forces (Grouchy's 33,000) and he was doubtful if he could hold out. Gneisenau's answer was—"Let Thielemann defend himself as best he can; it matters little if he is crushed at Wavre, provided we gain the victory *here*." Blücher's Chief of the Staff clearly showed, once more, that he recognised the difference between the essential and the non-essential in war.

Finally, at 6 p.m., the wreck of D'Erlon's Corps was led against La Haye Sainte. The buildings were nearly in ruins, the ammunition of the gallant defenders was exhausted; and at last the French broke in; but Major Baring and forty-two of the brave garrison cut through their assailants with the bayonet, and regained Mont St. Jean. Wellington now became uneasy, for the critical moment of the battle had undoubtedly arrived. Fortunately for the Allies, Bülow had retaken Plancenoit. The Emperor thereupon sent two battalions of the Middle Guard to recapture the village. These splendid veteran troops closed on the village, on two sides, and, disdaining to fire, turned the Prussians out with the bayonet, and pushed them back a good 600 yards to the east of the village. By one single smashing blow the Emperor had again set his right flank free.

Zieten's Corps reached Ohain at 6 p.m. At first the General wished to take up a position to support Blücher, but, pressed by Müffling's urgent entreaties, he commenced to bear down on Wellington's left.

Napoleon now essayed his last desperate venture, and entrusted five battalions of the Guard to Ney (who by this time had had his fifth horse shot under him) for a last attack on Wellington's centre. The remains of Reille's and D'Erlon's Corps were ordered to support this attack. But the effort came too late. Had the Emperor hurled all the Guard to the front, supported by every available man, to beat in Wellington's centre directly La Haye Sainte fell, it seems probable that the allied line must have yielded to this tremendous impact of veteran troops. But the delay, and Zieten's timely support, gave the Duke (who was resolute, vigilant, and prepared for any eventuality throughout the long trying hours of this Sunday afternoon in mid-June) the time to rearrange his line ; and by 8 p.m. the last French attack had spent itself, and down their battle-line, from one wing to another, there rang out the dread cry—" *La Garde recule !* " Wellington promptly let loose on the wavering masses in the valley below him his last cavalry reserve, the brigades of Vivian and Vandeleur. At the same moment Zieten irrupted through the right angle at the north-east point of the French front, and the whole army was in a moment transformed into a panic-stricken crowd which fled hastily from the battlefield ; and Prussian and English cavalry reached La Belle Alliance together.

Napoleon placed Petit's two battalions of the 1st Grenadiers of the Guard in squares to stem the retreat and gain time for the army to get away along the road to Genappe. Against these squares of the "Invincibles" all attacks were futile, and in France's darkest



hour the "bearskins" proved worthy of their finest traditions. In good order they finally left the battlefield and followed the army in its retreat.

Meanwhile Lobau had fought sternly around Plancenoit, to save the line of retreat for the Grand Army; not even among those burning ruins on the Danube's bank in 1809, where he and Masséna had saved another Grand Army from an earlier Waterloo, had he shown more undaunted courage. Lobau's determination, and the truculent fury with which his men fought, gave time for the Emperor to escape; and thus Lobau preventing his falling into Blücher's and Gneisenau's hands undoubtedly saved his master's life.

The French were relentlessly pressed in the pursuit by the Prussians, and, hunted out of seven successive bivouacs, were finally driven over the Sambre, reduced to a mere helpless horde of fugitives.

Meanwhile Grouchy, instead of containing the Prussian army, was himself contained by Thielemann with part of his corps at Wavre.

When at 5 p.m. Grouchy finally received Napoleon's last dispatch telling him that Bülow had been sighted on the heights of Chapelle St. Lambert, it was already too late for the Marshal to carry out the Emperor's instructions to turn westward to his aid.

By nightfall on the 18th Grouchy had forced his way across the Dyle in the face of the fine resistance offered by Thielemann despite the large numerical superiority of the French. But, now that the way to Mont St. Jean was at last open, the Emperor's cannon had long since ceased to be heard. Early on the morrow, the 19th,

Grouchy re-engaged and pushed Thielemann gradually back north of Wavre, until at 11 a.m. a messenger brought him tidings of the magnitude of the disaster at Waterloo; and the Marshal, realising the extreme gravity of his position, and the likelihood of his retreat being intercepted, did not in the immensity of the disaster give way to despair, but arranged a masterly and most successful retreat, and by the energy, decision, and rapidity with which he carried it out, escaped to France, up the Meuse Valley, with his 33,000 men intact.

One can only ask what might not have happened on June 17th and 18th had the unfortunate Marshal but displayed the same activity, resolution, military talent, strategic insight, and comprehension of the necessities of the situation as he did when all seemed lost both on and after June 19.

Waterloo is perhaps one of the most crushing defeats known to history, and it is consequently instructive to examine the causes to which this may be attributed. These would appear to be :—

(i) The direction of the Prussian attack, *i.e.* the French right rear. It is clear that when two armies acting from divergent bases do manage to combine on the battlefield, one or other must inevitably strike the foe in flank, or rear, inflicting usually a mortal wound.

(ii) But the magnitude of the disaster will largely depend on the energy with which the pursuit is pushed. Gneisenau after Waterloo rose to the occasion and gave the French no breathing space, and no time to rally before Paris itself was eventually reached.

With reference to the battle itself, there are several

incidents that occurred during its course that will well repay investigation.

It is not at first easy to understand why Napoleon deferred his attack till 11 a.m. His orders testify to the fact that he meant to commence the action early in the morning. The attack was postponed from 6 a.m. to 9 a.m., and then once more deferred, on account of the sodden ground, which forbade all movements of artillery and cavalry until it had had some time to dry ; and also the rapid pursuit of June 17 (carried out, as Mercer has it, "at the pace of a fox hunt") had spreadeagled the French army, who in closing up outmarched their commissariat and were hardly in sufficiently good trim to commence an attack on Wellington's position at daybreak. But had the battle begun at 6 a.m., then Grouchy's great strategic blunder would have led to no serious consequences, for the English army would have commenced its retreat before Blücher could strike a blow to help it.

It must not be overlooked, however, that here, as at Ligny, he did not remain idle, but utilised the time in making a careful personal reconnaissance before committing himself to the attack. As a result of this reconnaissance, he formed an admirable plan of attack by which a vigorous diversion against his enemy's right was to cover the attack against his centre and left, to be eventually followed by the penetration of the centre by the whole of the reserve, a favourite and generally successful manoeuvre. The essence of Wellington's scheme of defence lay in the concealment of his dispositions and the light occupation of the general position, with local and general reserves under cover ready to move to the point assailed. He was

not strong enough to arrange for a grand counter-attack, nor was Napoleon the man to give him the opportunity ; but the advancing Prussians striking the French in flank would form the offensive movement essential to success even when standing on the defensive.

The failure of Napoleon's scheme of attack may be traced first to the fact that his diversion against the right flank did not deceive Wellington into unduly reinforcing that flank, and secondly, to the indifferent tactics of his subordinates, who failed to appreciate the true value of fire effect, *e.g.* D'Erlon's Corps, and, later, the Guard, attacked in heavy columns and were repulsed by the fire of the British line. D'Erlon's formation indeed was so vicious that although five times as numerous as his opponents, the brigades of Pack and Kempt (Picton's Division), his corps could bring no more muskets to bear than could the British ; and the unwieldy columns, too, formed a target which it was impossible to miss ; consequently the French were worsted in the fire-fight which ensued.

The charge of the Union Brigade illustrates the penalty to be paid for the tactical error of permitting a body of cavalry to charge without keeping a portion of it in reserve to cover its retirement or re-formation ; and of the price that has to be paid when a cavalry charge is allowed to overreach itself.

More important features were :—

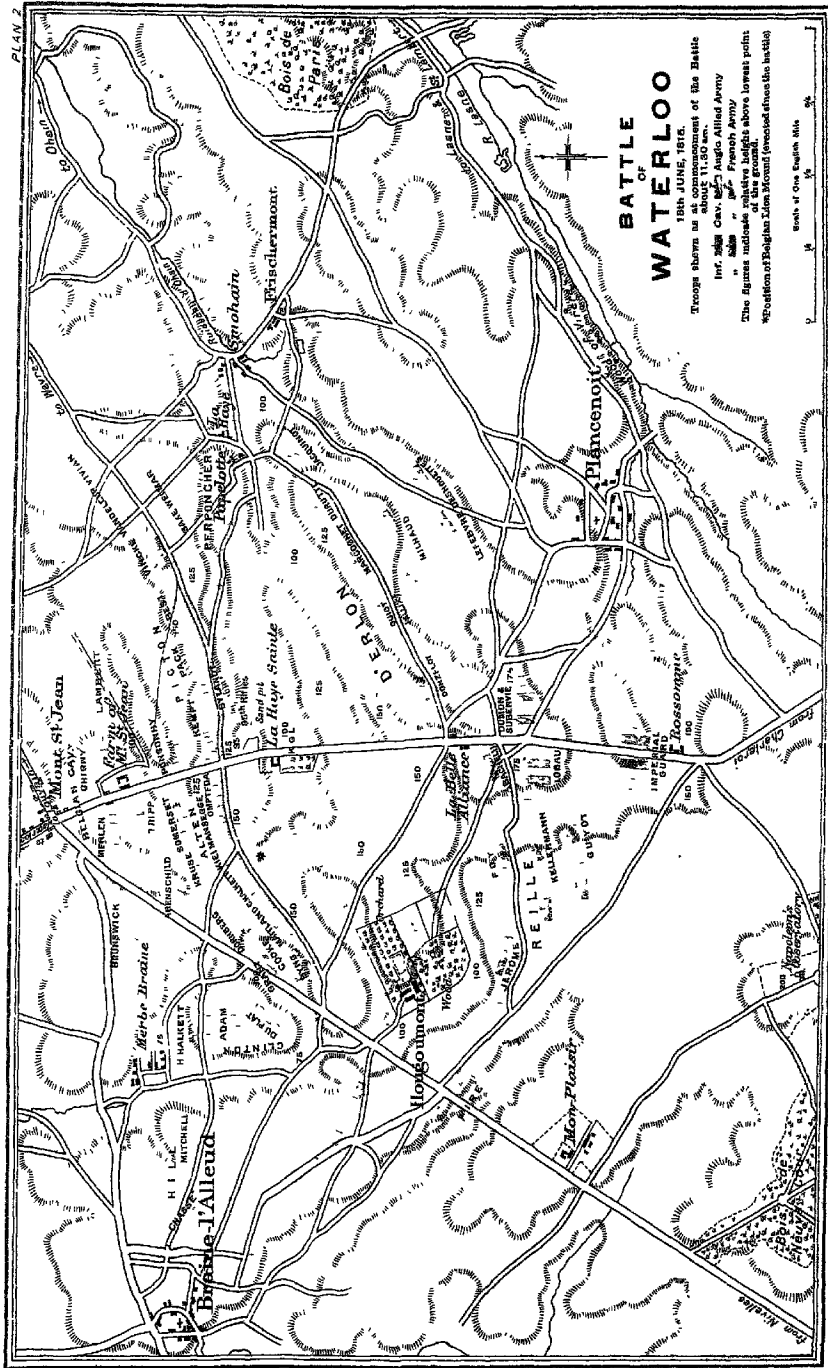
(i) The absence of Grouchy's Corps from the battlefield. Had Grouchy manœuvred so as to cross the Dyle higher up, and to detain at least two Prussian corps, then the panic which ensued at the close of the battle when

Zieten debouched at Papelotte would have been avoided ; and also Wellington would have been unable to use Vandeleur's and Vivian's Cavalry Brigades to support his centre at the critical moment, and he might then have been unable to reform his line before the assault of the Guard—and under this supreme onslaught the British line might well have yielded. Further, had Blücher heard the sound of a great battle raging in his rear, would he have engaged to succour the English, at the certain risk of sharing in their defeat? It is unlikely, for although he was ardent enough—yet he was undoubtedly circumspect.

The appointment of Grouchy, who had gained his great reputation merely as a leader of horse, was unwise ; and to entrust the safety of the right wing to a leader who had never held in war an important command before, and whose strategic insight and initiative were unknown quantities, was hazardous in the extreme.

(ii) Napoleon's neglect to hold the passages of the Lasne permitted the Prussians, in spite of the heavy roads, to arrive in time to decide the issue of the battle. Lobau should not have been contented with taking up a position some 1,200 yards east of La Belle Alliance, but he should have held the range of steep hills commanding the valley of the Lasne. Here he could have resisted longer and more efficiently, and Blücher would have been forced to turn him by way of Couture, thus gaining important time for his master. At any rate Lobau might have occupied the Paris Wood.

The first of these is directly traceable to neglect of staff duties, in that a message received from Grouchy at 2 a.m.



Thought & shall <sup>not</sup> be the  
hero of my drama as best  
I shall be one of the  
spectators of my  
tragedy. - Napoleon.

No body is born good or bad  
it is the circumstances which  
largely determine whether  
a child is destined to  
be a great man or  
rascal. Napoleon.

must admire the decision of Gneisenau, who, after Ligny, first directed the Prussians on Wavre, and also the eagerness of Blücher in marching to Waterloo, and urging on his infantry to assist in hauling the embogged cannon through the miry meadows between Wavre and St. Lambert, so that he might keep his word and arrive in time on the field of battle.

Reviewing the campaign as a whole, the salient features are the difficulties and dangers incurred by two armies on divergent lines endeavouring to combine on the battlefield ; and the decisive success achieved when they do so combine. Other inferences that may be drawn from the incidents of this campaign may be divided into two heads, strategical and tactical. Those connected with Strategy are :—

(i) Vigorously offensive strategy often offers the best chance of success to the weaker of two belligerents.

(ii) Single lines have many advantages over double, or divergent, lines ; but when armies operating on divergent lines can manage to combine on the battlefield, the blow delivered is generally fatal. But of course much depends on the pursuit : if that is relentless, the full fruits of the victory are reaped ; otherwise the beaten army recovers in due course, and again shows front.

(iii) Concentration of every available man at the decisive point is a fundamental principle of sound strategy.

(iv) Time is a most valuable asset. To waste it is to court disaster.

(v) Surprise is a most powerful weapon both in strategy and tactics.

(vi) " It is a principle that admits of no exception that



the concentration of an army should take place out of striking distance of the enemy."

(vii) It is important that all considerable detachments should be kept informed of the situation elsewhere.

(viii) War is not a conjectural art. Every effort should be made to obtain certain information. When this fails, it is preferable to form some definite plan and carry it through energetically rather than do nothing ; but this plan must be based on a careful study of the situation and a right application of the principles of war thereto. It is most important that preparations be made to meet other possible contingencies.

(ix) A thorough performance of staff duties is essential. It is not every subordinate commander that is qualified for the duties of the chief of the staff. The strange redistribution of staff duties in the Grand Army of 1815 was largely responsible for the disaster that followed.

(x) The assumption of responsibility by subordinates at critical moments is to be encouraged, but orders once given by a superior should be faithfully obeyed unless the situation for which that order was intended has changed between its issue and receipt, *e.g.* Prince Bernard's and Perponcher's march to Quatre Bras are fine examples of correct and ready assumption of initiative.

The opposite is the case with Marshal Grouchy when he was faced with a situation on June 18 that obviously contravened the *spirit* of his instructions. Like all weak commanders, he decided that rather than follow the hazardous advice of his generals and march to the assistance of his Emperor, who was then hotly engaged, as the thunder of his cannon testified, he would keep blindly

to the *letter* of the Emperor's instructions, which he felt would cover him whatever happened.

Under the head of Tactics may be classed :—

(i) Personal reconnaissance is of great value to a commander, *e.g.* Wellington after Quatre Bras, Napoleon at Ligny and Waterloo. Nowadays a personal reconnaissance will very seldom be possible, and it is therefore all the more important that general officers should be provided with a competent and well-trained staff, capable of making reconnaissances on the same lines. Two officers may be equally competent to make a good reconnaissance, but if they, so to speak, use different languages, the net result will not be very comprehensible to the officer who has to utilise it.

(ii) Large reserves and their timely use will frequently decide the issue of a battle.

(iii) There are other means besides the dangerous flank attack of driving an enemy from his position. Napoleon's favourite plan of a general and sustained attack supported by massed guns, which were used to blow a hole in the opposing battle-line, and culminating in a central attack by a large body of fresh troops held in reserve all day for the purpose, usually succeeded ; and it is not impossible that it would succeed to-day, for preparation by shrapnel now takes the place of the case-shot attack of the Napoleonic times.

(iv) Cavalry is largely ineffective against formed and unshaken infantry, unless it takes them by surprise. When charging, it requires support to rally on and to re-form on. It should always therefore keep a reserve in hand. One of its most important rôles is that of obtaining information. Failure in this respect is apt to bring disaster in its train

(v) Even in those days of slow-loading weapons, indications are to be found that superiority of fire-effect was the deciding factor in the tactical struggle, *e.g.* the frequent repulse of Napoleon's columns by the British line. As the Emperor had so wisely remarked : " Fire is everything, and the rest nothing." But he also held that it is not sufficient that the soldier should shoot, but he must shoot well. And good shooting is not a matter merely of goodwill, or of expert marksmanship at the butts ; rather, in the battle, it is the result of discipline.

(vi) Concentrated artillery fire has a shattering and demoralising effect on the enemy, and prepares the way for the infantry attack. As has already been mentioned, Napoleon relied on his case-shot attack to overwhelm any front which his enemies sought to oppose to his advance. This form of attack was first initiated as a comprehensive idea at the battle of Friedland, on June 14, 1807. It proved most successful, and much simplified the Emperor's strategy, for by its means he endeavoured to overwhelm his opponent within the time limit, and so defeat him ere any support could arrive. The storm of grape hurled against the enemy at 300 yards range in those times is replaced by the *rafales* of shrapnel, which sweep the defender's lines to-day with a sheet of lead, from a range of 3,000 yards.

(vii) To neglect pursuit is to sacrifice the fruits of victory. Pursuit should be vigorous and well sustained, and fresh troops should be employed for that purpose. Nowadays the organisation of a vigorous and immediate pursuit will be an operation of no little difficulty.

(viii) The state of the weather must not be neglected in military operations. The heavy rain, in delaying

Blücher, exposed Wellington to tactical defeat. Climate will always impose limitations on both tactics and strategy. But the two great storms on the evening of June 16, and in the afternoon of June 17, considerably interfered with Napoleon's plans. Grouchy, on June 18, pleaded the state of the rough, boggy cross-roads between Wavre and Mont St. Jean as one of the excuses for not marching to the latter place to the relief of his Emperor. He stated that with the roads in their then sodden state, he could not arrive in time to be of any use.

Although the rain did delay Blücher's march, it assisted Wellington by putting an obstacle in Grouchy's path; and, better still, it delayed, for several valuable hours, Napoleon's attack on the British position.

Before leaving the campaign we may briefly enumerate the causes of Napoleon's ultimate defeat, despite the fact that by his brilliant opening move he had gained a great advantage over the Allies. It is suggested that the most important reasons are as follows :—

(i) The staunchness of Wellington's force. Their good discipline enabled them to show a determined front to Napoleon long after the time they should have been overwhelmed, according to ordinary calculation. This upsetting of the time limit gave Blücher the chance to intervene successfully on the battlefield. And this staunch resistance was due to the discipline of the army, which enabled all ranks to bear with fortitude and determination the strain of that long day. And discipline ensured that in resisting each attack, every regiment brought all its musket-barrels to bear full and telling on the advancing masses.

(ii) Blücher's loyalty to his ally. This feature as a rule is inconspicuous in coalition wars; and history may be searched in vain for the record of an ally more staunch and true than the indomitable Blücher.

(iii) The failure of Napoleon's subordinates to rise to the height of the occasion.

(a) Grouchy's failure to find and hold Blücher.

If the Emperor was to succeed in beating the Allies in detail, it was necessary that one should be destroyed whilst the other was prevented from co-operating at that moment. At Quatre Bras, on June 16, Ney gave full employment for all the men Wellington could concentrate: and Napoleon beat Blücher at Ligny. But Grouchy failed to hold Blücher at Wavre on the 18th; and Waterloo resulted from Blücher's intervention coming in time and in sufficient force; this, of course, was partly due to the lateness of the commencement of Napoleon's attack on Wellington.

Grouchy indeed showed that he could not command the force entrusted to him with intelligence.

Throughout the campaign it will be noticed that the distances are cramped. The Allies, on and after the 16th, are *within* two days' march of each other, and these proportions are too small for safety, and enormously increase the risk of operating on interior lines.

(b) And next let us briefly consider Ney's faults—his timidity before Quatre Bras on the 15th and early on the 16th; and his reckless daring at Mont St. Jean, when he attempted to hurl down an unshaken infantry, occupying a dominant position, with his magnificent horsemen. For without preparation, without supports, without orders,

and before the appointed time, he deliberately risked the great movement planned by the Emperor. He even engaged the last cavalry reserve of the army in his mad enterprise. Further, how did he fail to recognise that La Haye Sainte was the key of the whole allied position? Why did he not batter it down with artillery, instead of making three assaults on the place, held, too, by only a battalion of infantry? When he did carry it, it was too late to turn the gain to advantage.

We need not elaborate further the blunders of the Emperor's subordinates, for men who take the field in the frame of mind that they possessed can hardly be expected to think clearly when the crisis occurs. But we may say that had Napoleon been served as well in this brief campaign as he had been in the days of his great victories, the result would have been very different. In fact the all-powerful engine of war constructed by the Emperor was either worn out, or at least badly overstrained.

(iv) Lastly, Napoleon's deterioration. Whatever may be urged in the great Emperor's favour, arguing from his fine opening moves and other reasons, the thoughtful will hardly claim that he was the general of 1796, 1800, 1805, 1806, or 1807.

For he had lost, on his own evidence, his belief in his star, and no longer felt convinced that he must succeed. Whilst at the zenith of his powers, he had been a bold, audacious gambler; but now, as his powers declined, he became more timid in his play, and in this campaign we see him waiting for the lucky moment. It comes, it passes by unrecognised, or at least unutilised, and the Emperor no longer will dare all, to win all.